



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

Jean Van Hamme

Ted Benoit



THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

Script: Jean Van Hamme

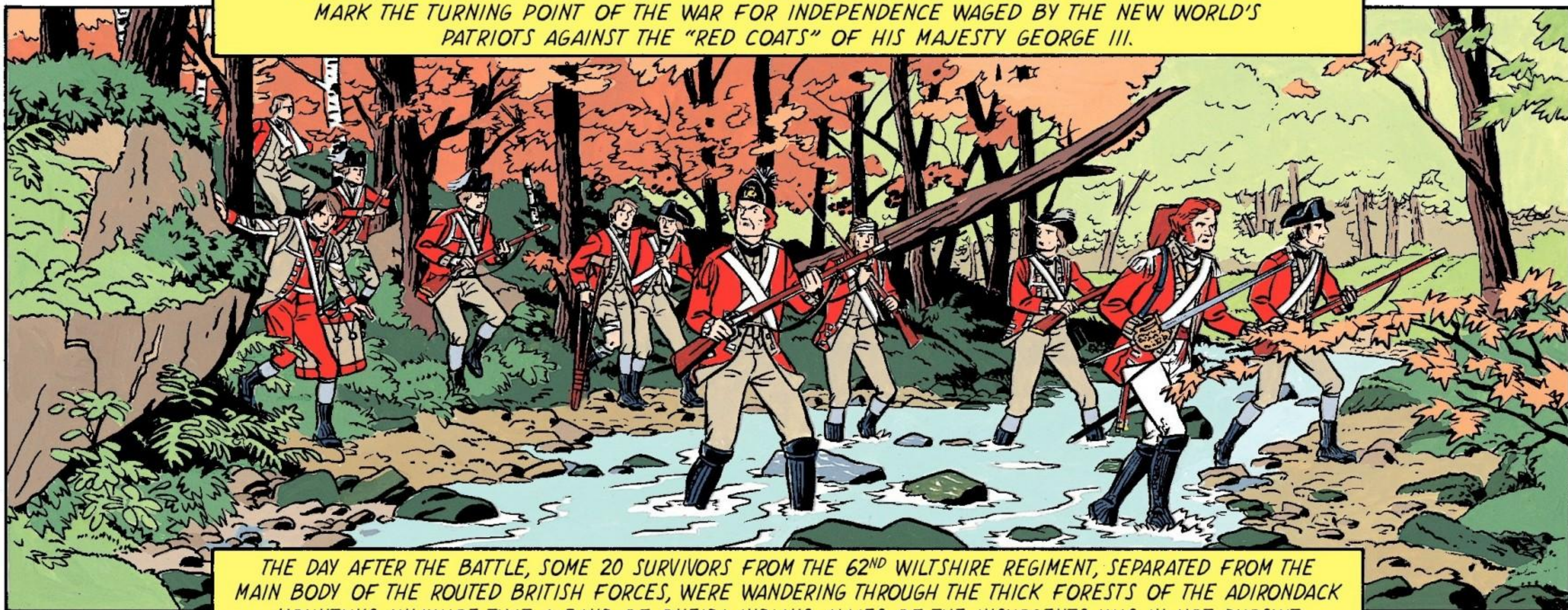
Drawing: Ted Benoit

Colour Work: Madeleine De Mille



Based on the characters of
EDGAR P. JACOBS

ON THE 17TH OF OCTOBER 1777, 15 MONTHS AFTER THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BY THE 13 COLONIES OF AMERICA, THE "INSURGENTS'" CRUSHING VICTORY AT SARATOGA WOULD MARK THE TURNING POINT OF THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE WAGED BY THE NEW WORLD'S PATRIOTS AGAINST THE "RED COATS" OF HIS MAJESTY GEORGE III.

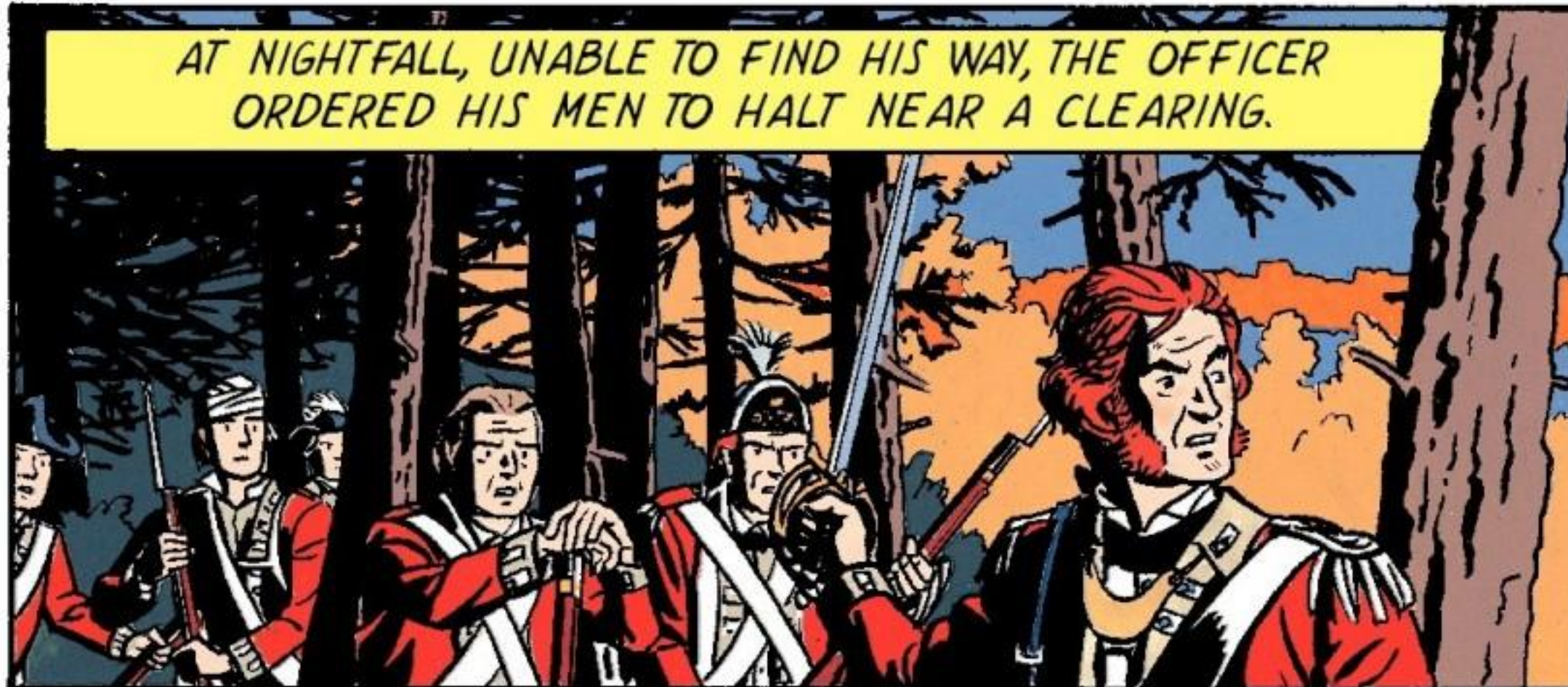


THE DAY AFTER THE BATTLE, SOME 20 SURVIVORS FROM THE 62ND WILTSHIRE REGIMENT, SEPARATED FROM THE MAIN BODY OF THE ROUTED BRITISH FORCES, WERE WANDERING THROUGH THE THICK FORESTS OF THE ADIRONDACK MOUNTAINS, UNAWARE THAT A BAND OF ONEIDA INDIANS, ALLIES OF THE INSURGENTS, WAS IN HOT PURSUIT.

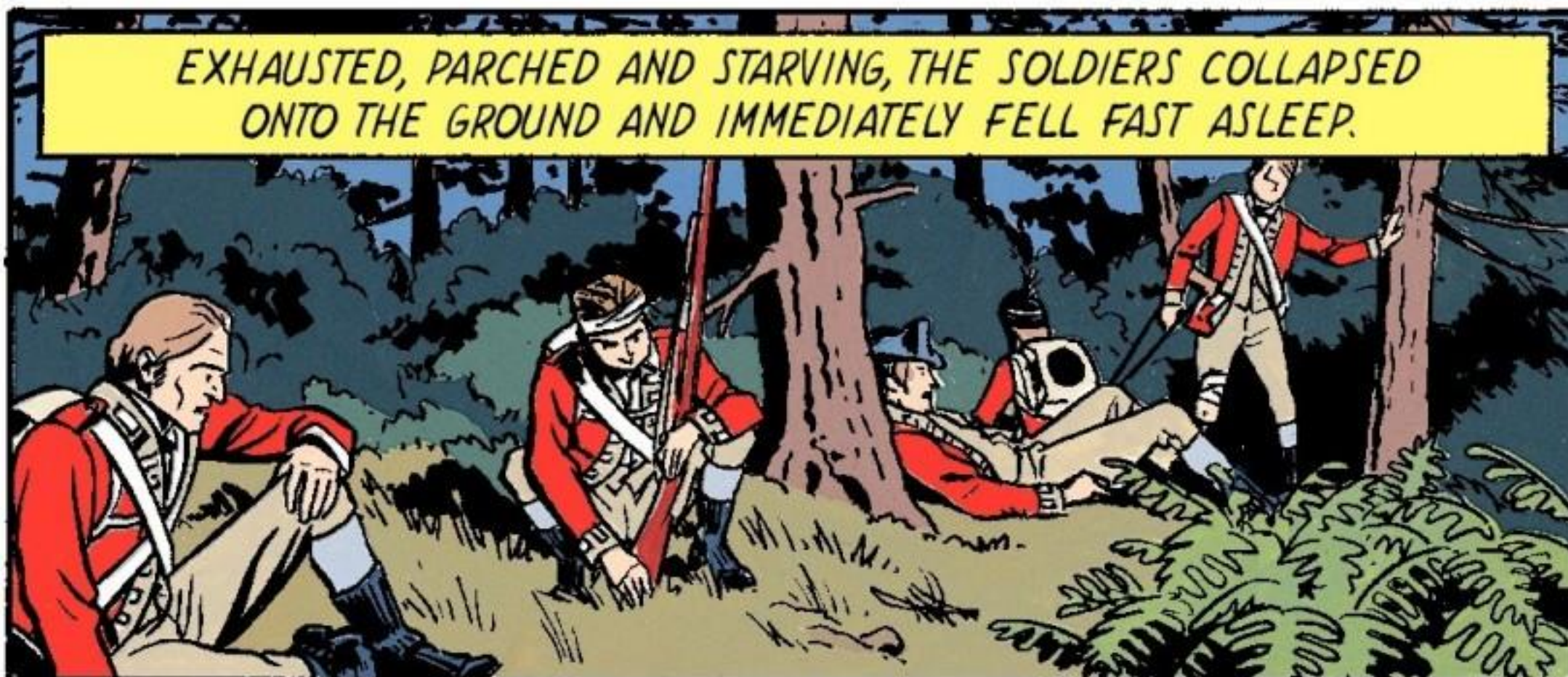
THEY WERE LED BY A 34-YEAR-OLD MAJOR NAMED LACHLAN MACQUARRIE, A PENNILESS SCOTTISH GENTLEMAN AND CAREER OFFICER OF THE BRITISH ARMY WHO HAD SERVED MOSTLY OVERSEAS.



AT NIGHTFALL, UNABLE TO FIND HIS WAY, THE OFFICER ORDERED HIS MEN TO HALT NEAR A CLEARING.



EXHAUSTED, PARCHED AND STARVING, THE SOLDIERS COLLAPSED ONTO THE GROUND AND IMMEDIATELY FELL FAST ASLEEP.



THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE SMALL BAND, REGIMENTAL DRUMMER DERMOT PITT, WAS ONLY 15. STRICKEN WITH FEAR AND HUNGER, HE COULDN'T FIND SLEEP, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS AS TIRED AS THE OTHERS.



SURROUNDED BY THE LOW RUMBLING OF THE SOLDIERS' SNORING, THE YOUNG BOY DREAMED OF HIS FOLKS WAITING FOR HIM BACK IN HIS BELOVED WALES, WONDERING ANXIOUSLY IF HE'D EVER HAVE THE JOY OF SEEING THEM AGAIN.

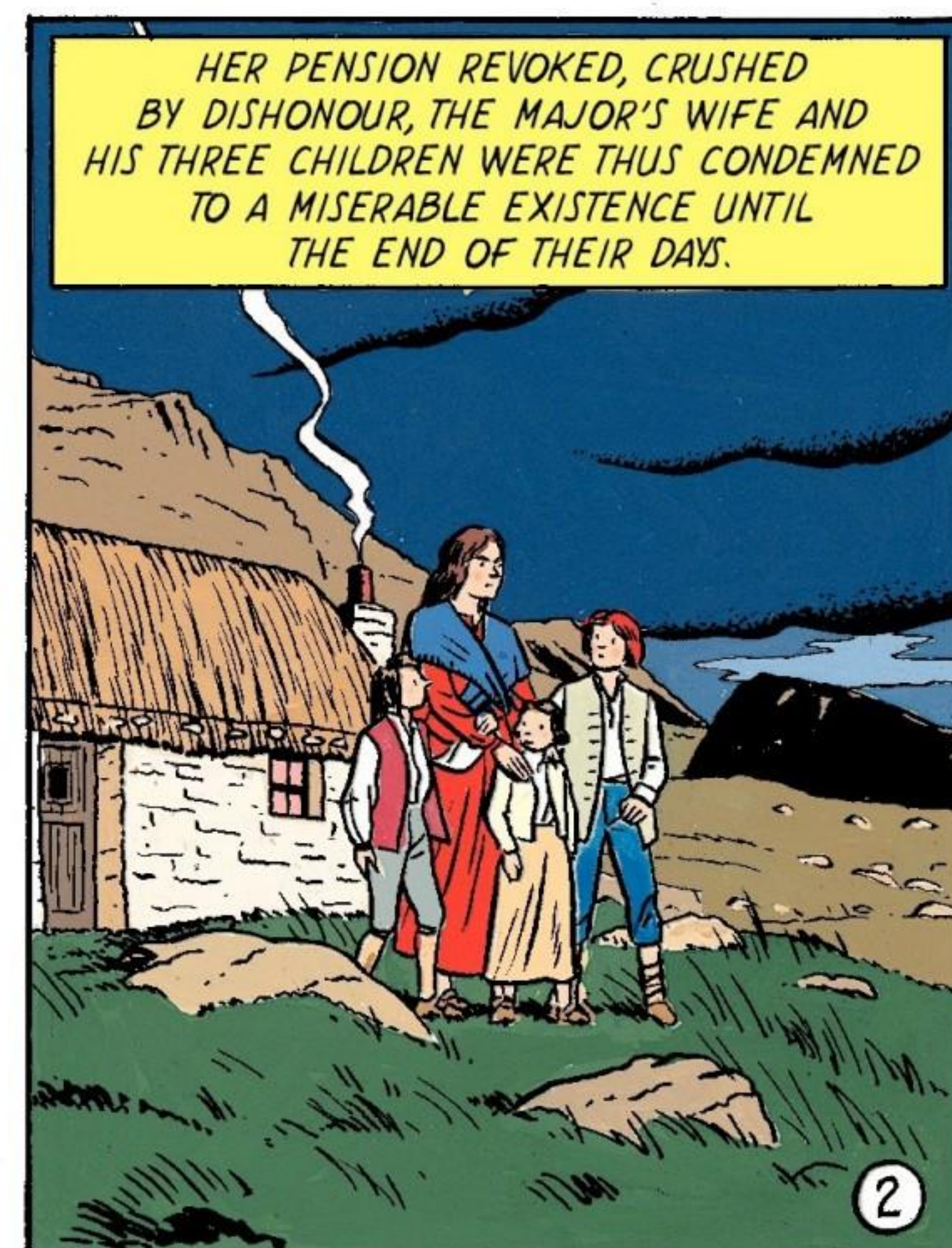
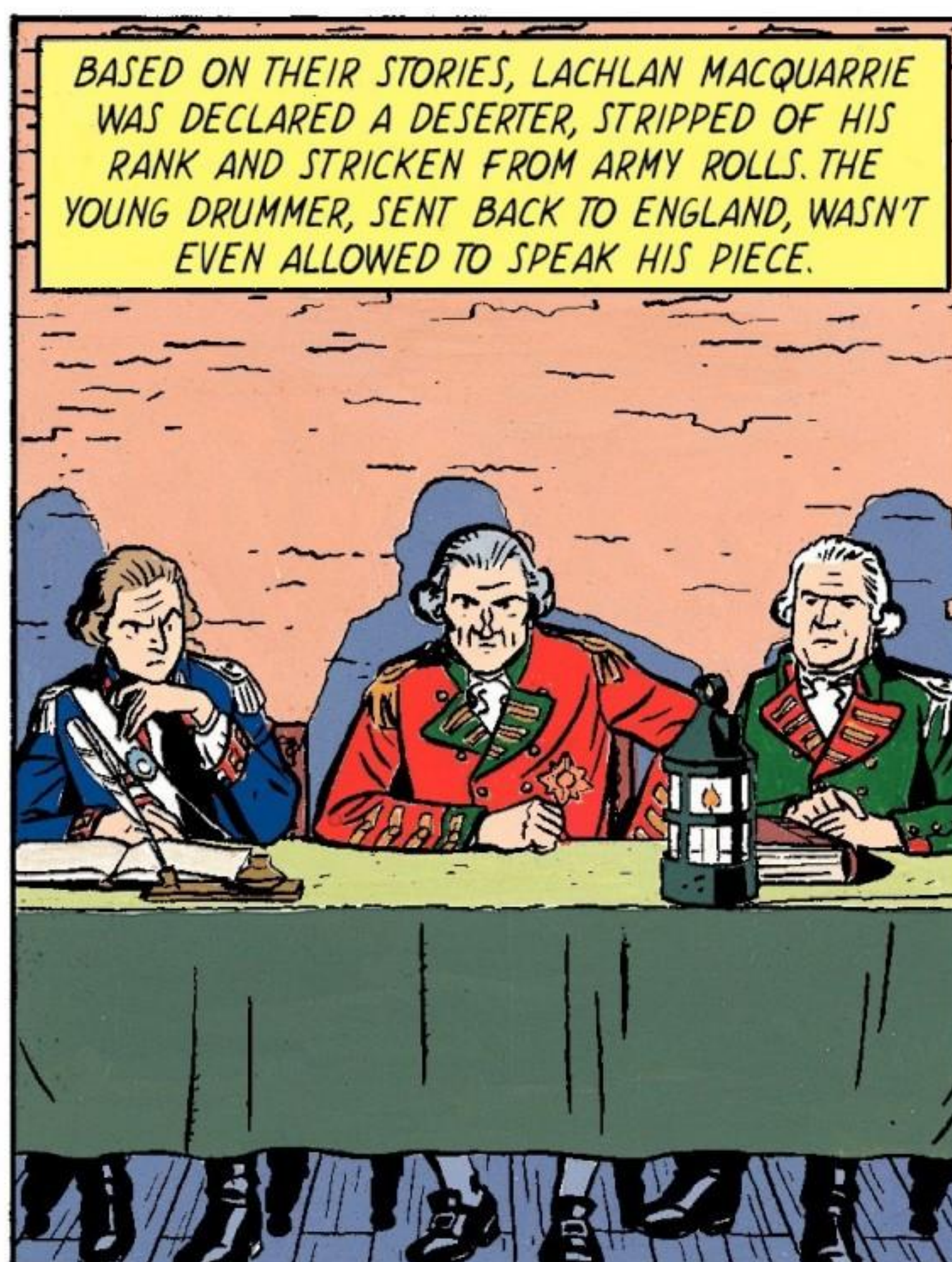
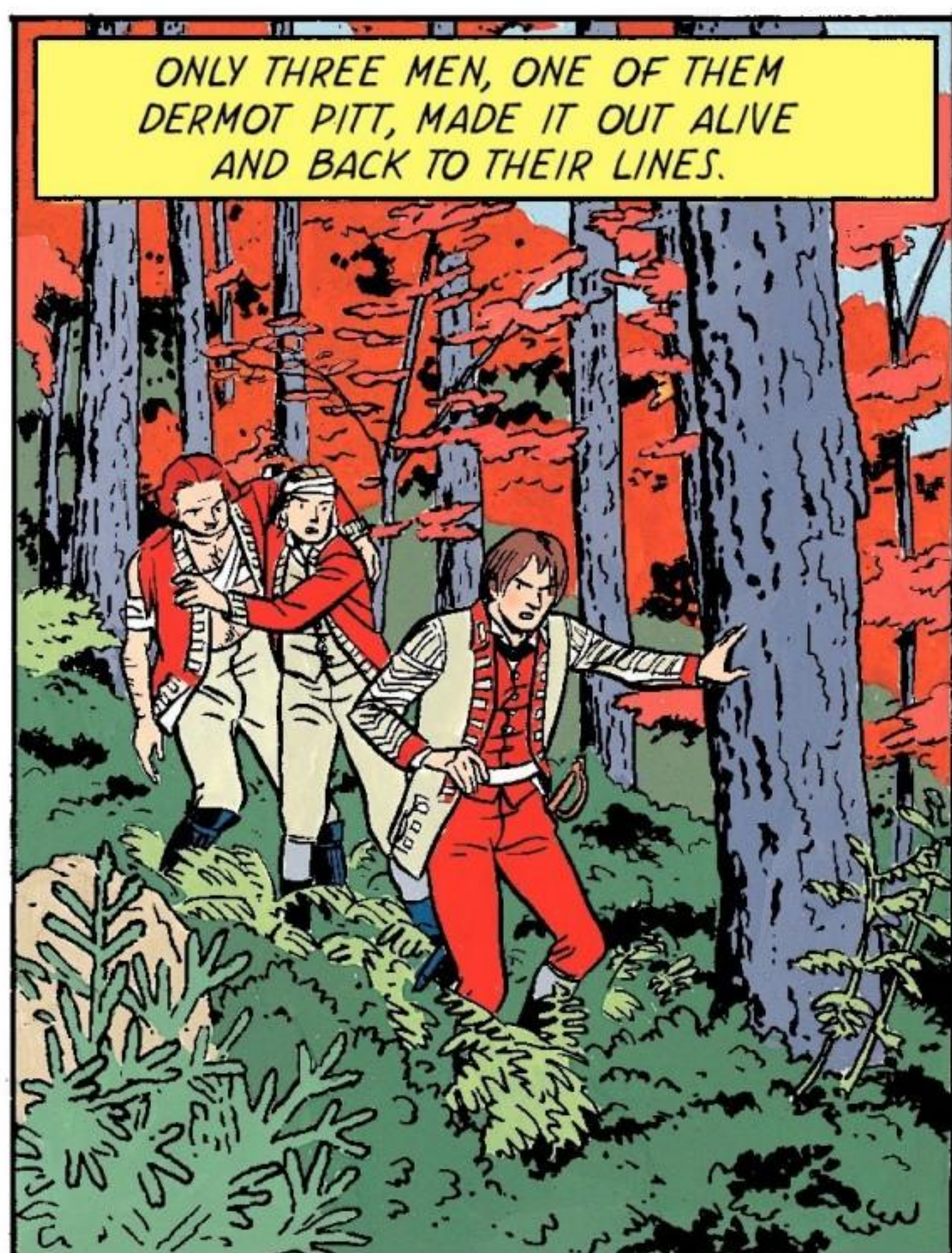
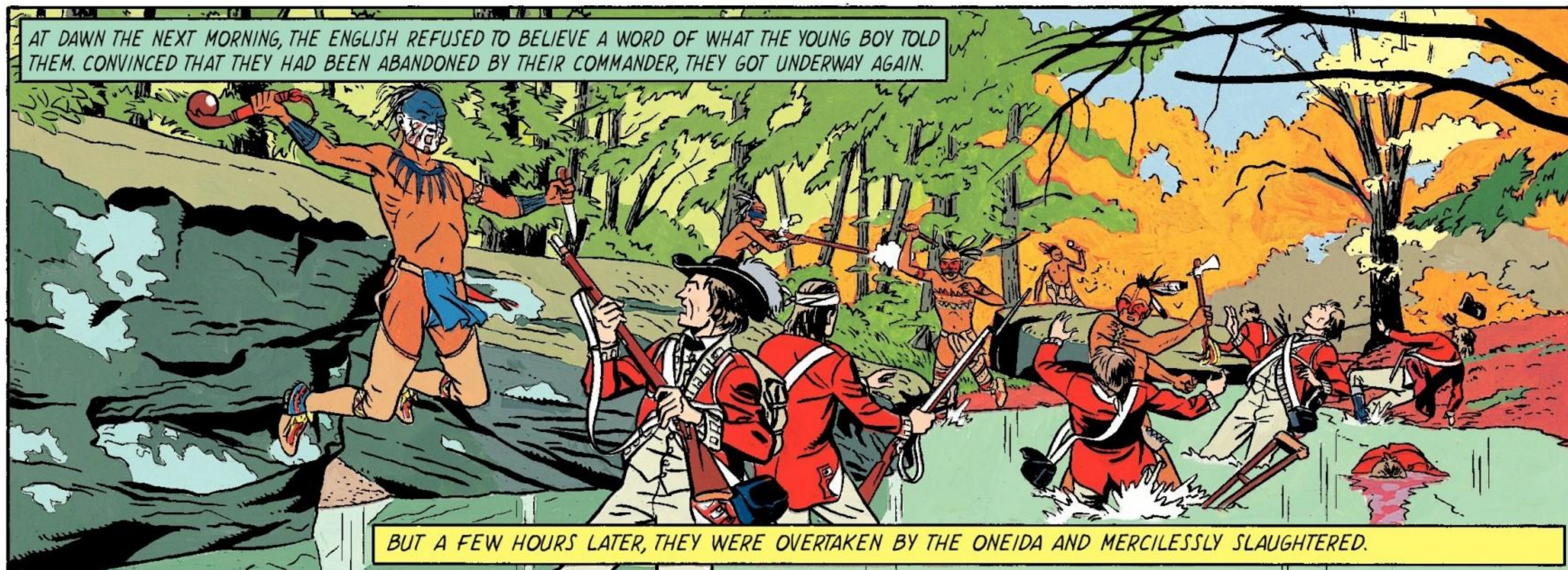
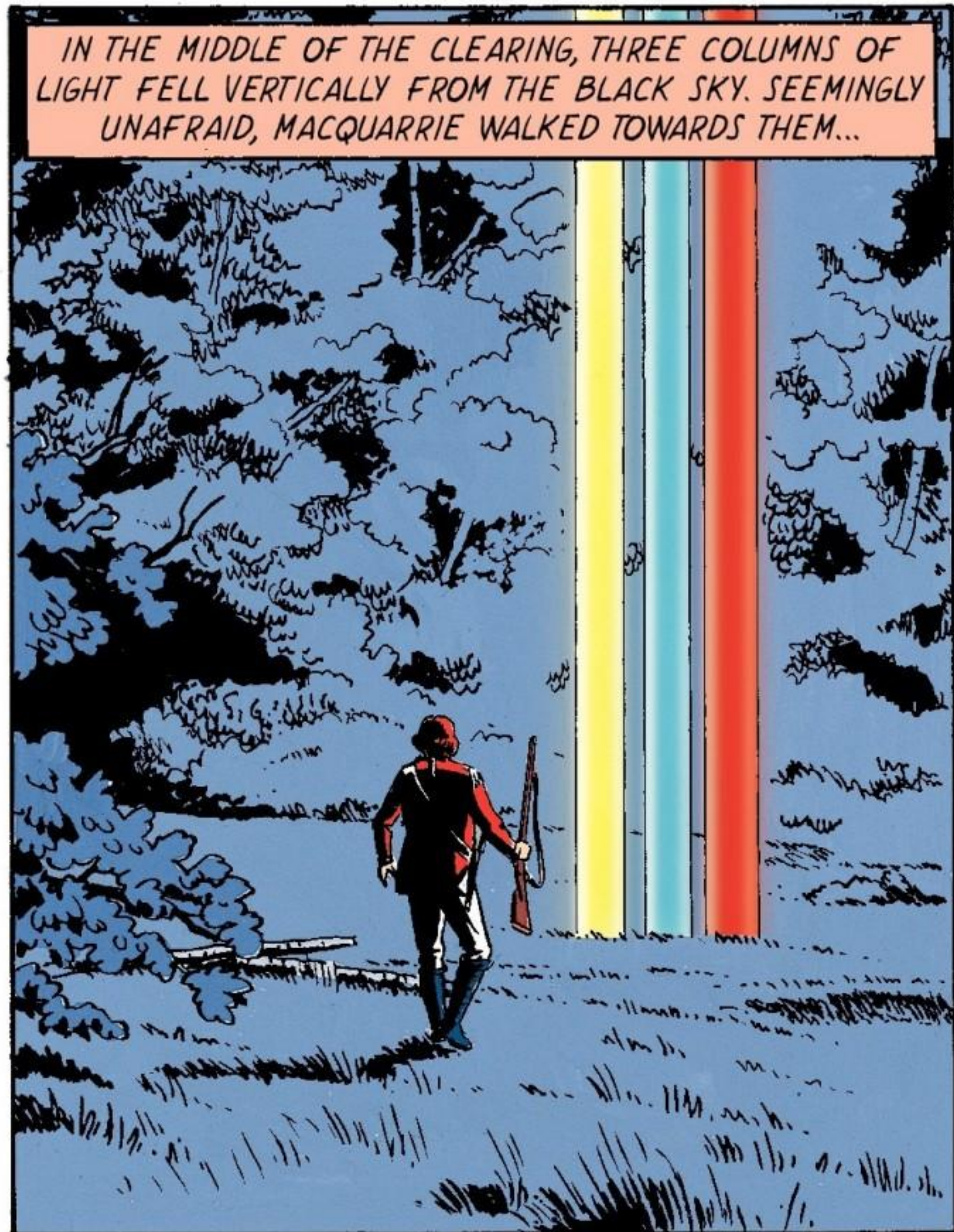


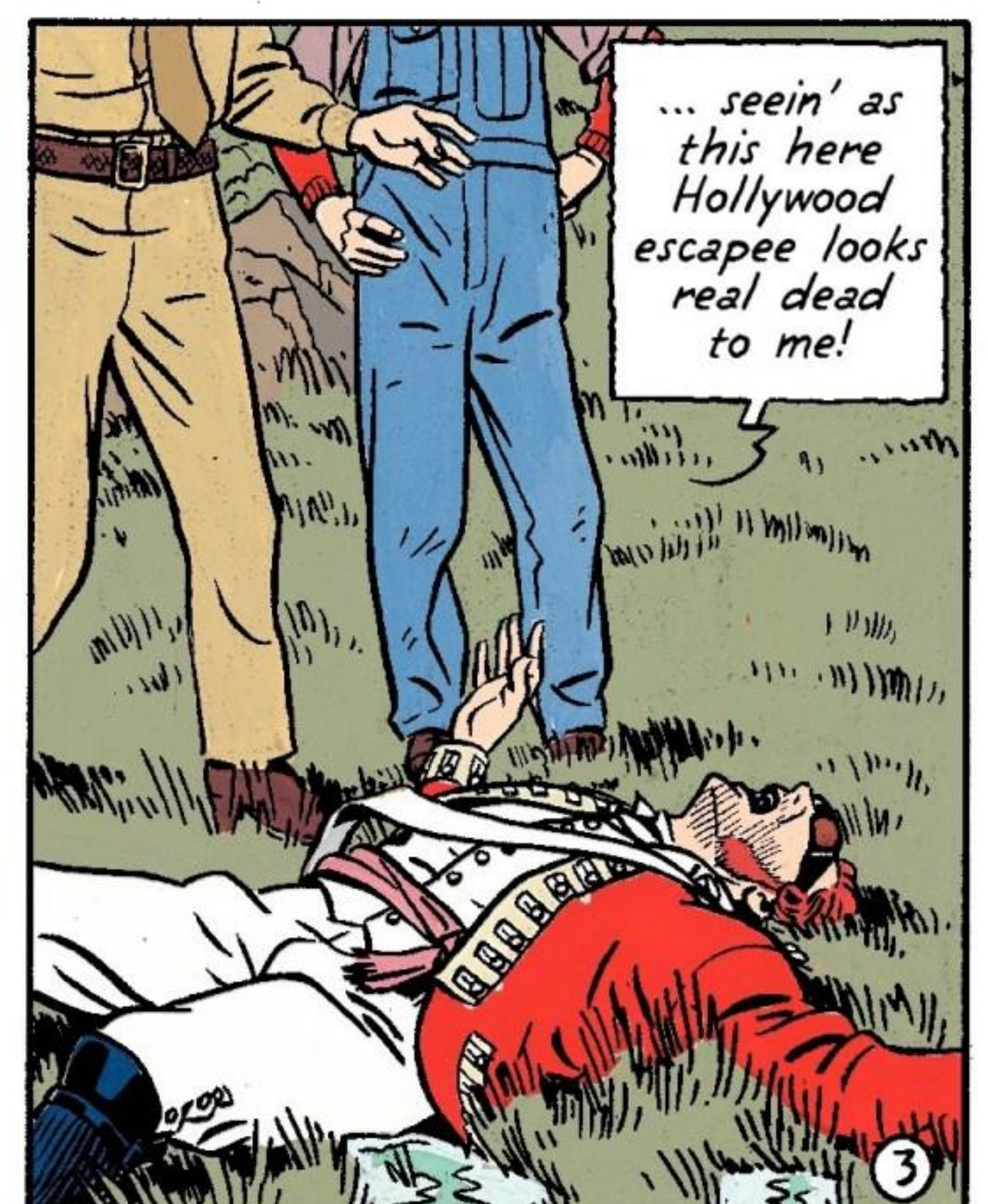
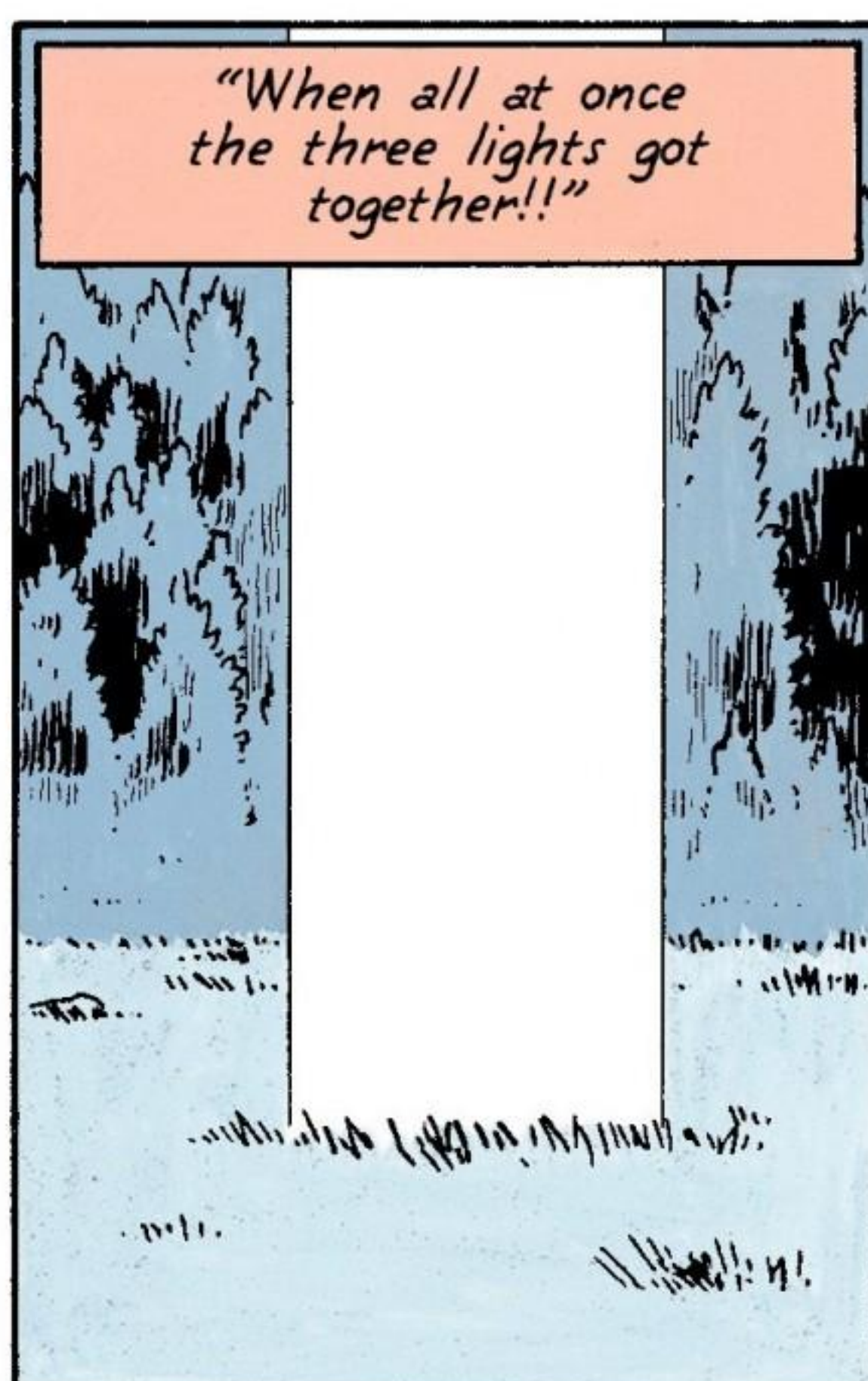
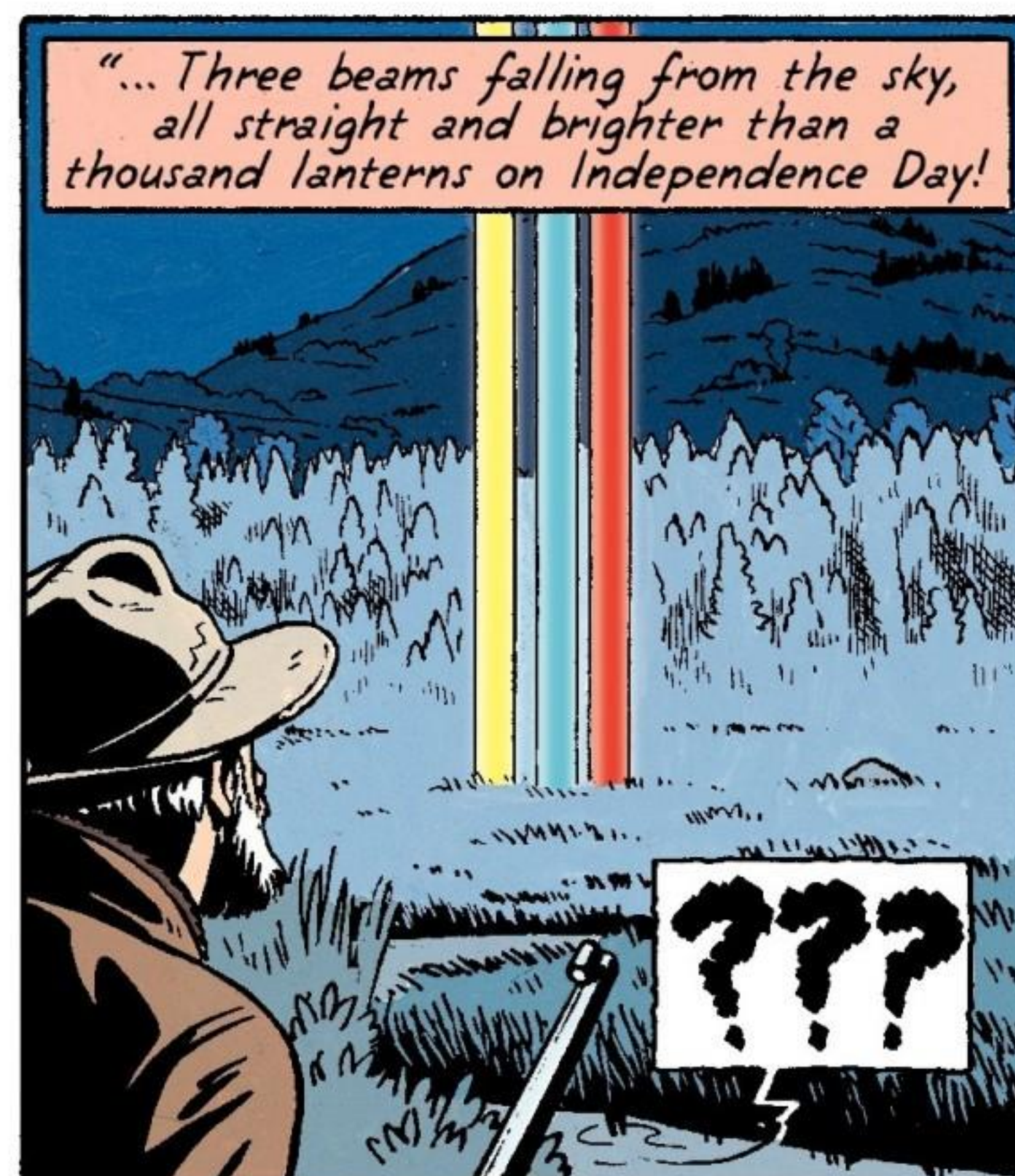
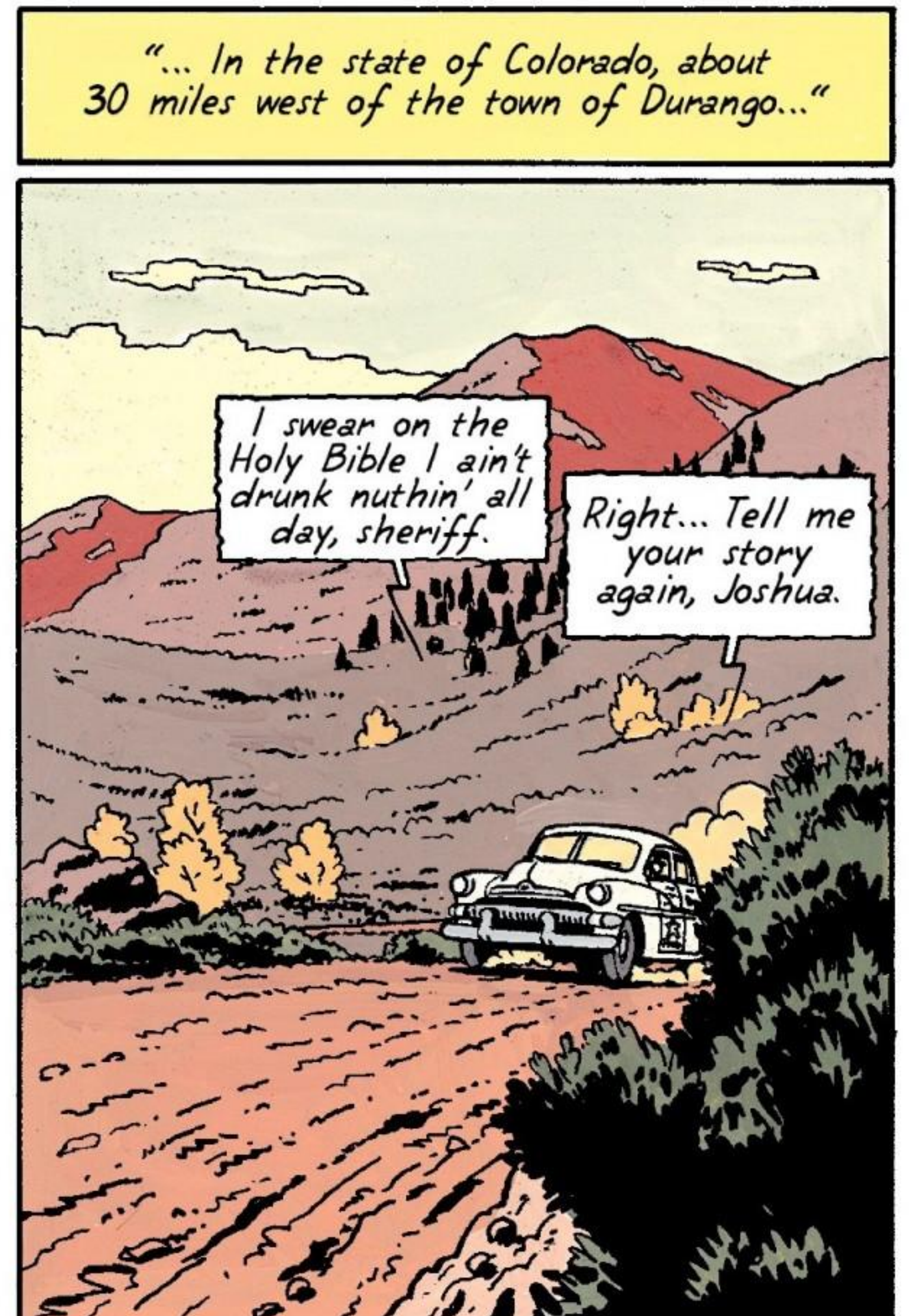
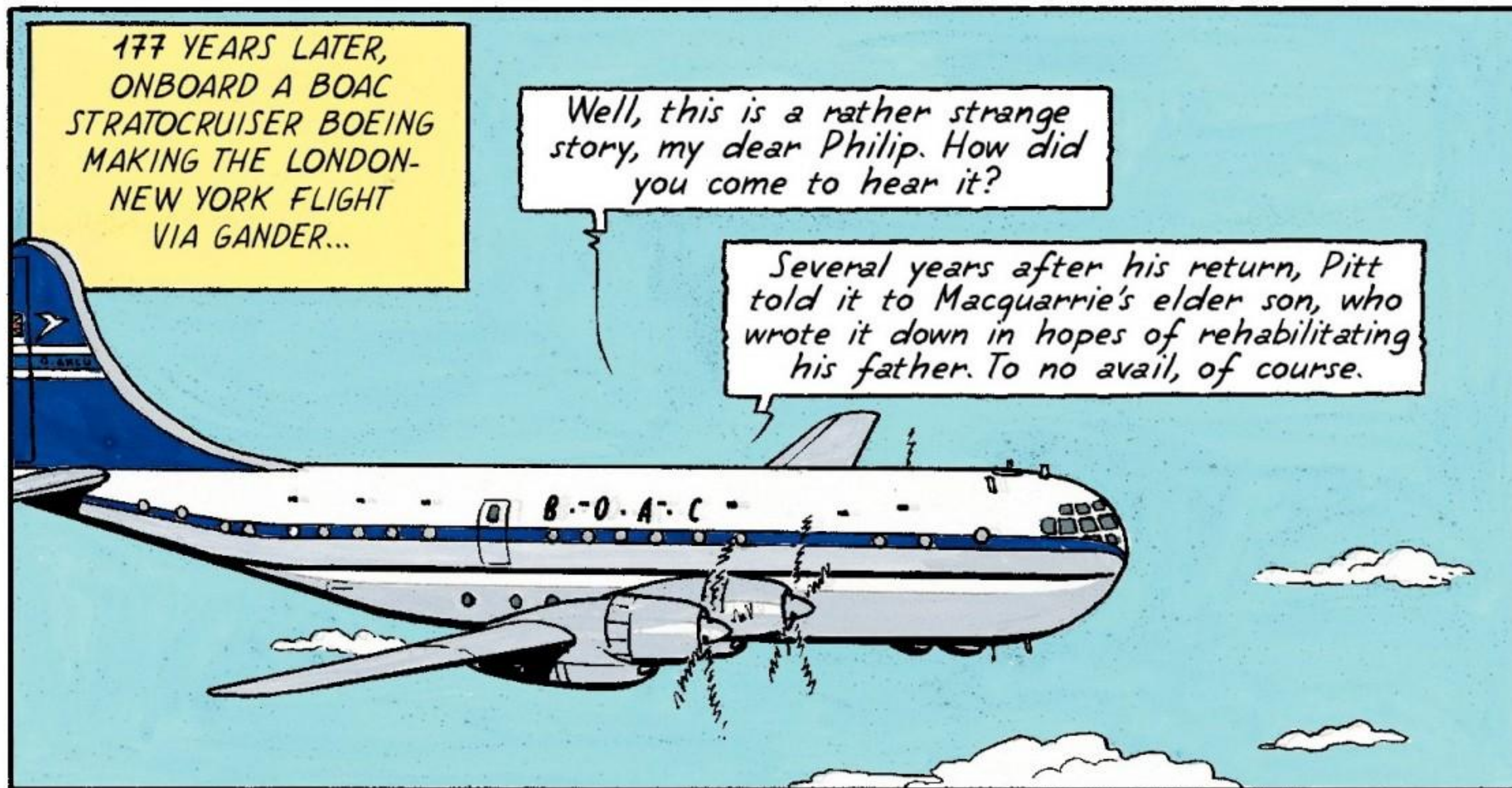
SUDDENLY, A STRANGE LIGHT BEYOND THE TREES TORE HIM FROM HIS THOUGHTS. TURNING HIS HEAD, HE SAW MAJOR MACQUARRIE, WHO HAD ALSO STAYED AWAKE, CAREFULLY HEADING TOWARDS IT, A MUSKET IN HANDS.



INTRIGUED, DERMOT FOLLOWED. BUT UPON REACHING THE EDGE OF THE CLEARING, HE FROZE, STUNNED BY THE INCREDIBLE SIGHT BEFORE HIM.









Incredible!
And this man
would be...?

Lachlan Macquarrie,
reappearing 2000
miles away from
where he'd vanished
almost two centuries
earlier. But it's still
only a theory.

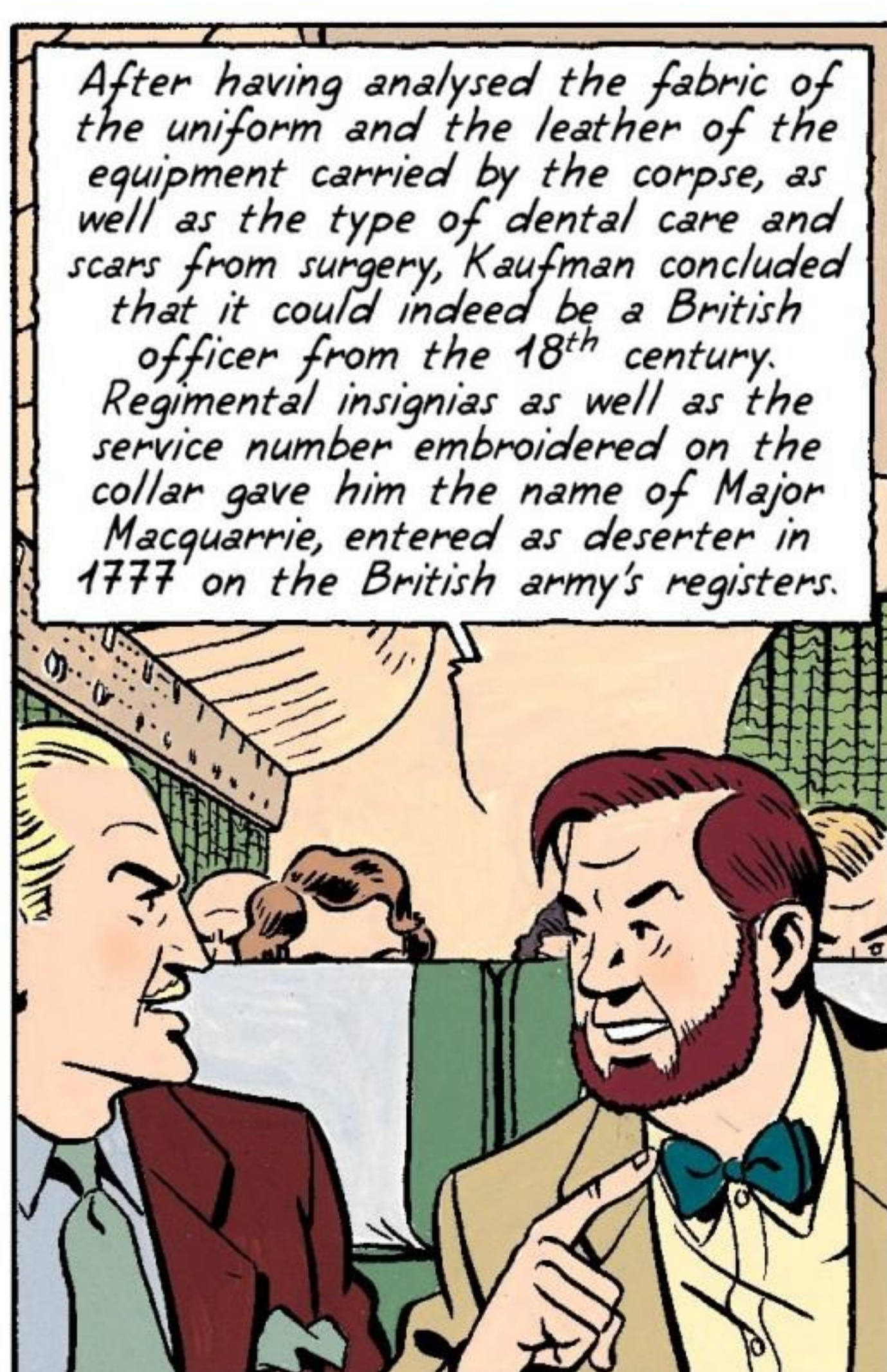


Don't tell me he'd been
abducted by Martians!

Don't laugh, Francis. The Americans
are taking this sort of possi-
bility very seriously, and their
government is extremely careful
to keep this kind of... unusual
event strictly confidential.



Macquarrie's body—if it is indeed
he—was immediately taken to the
Centre for Spatial Studies near
Topeka, Kansas, where the
Section of Unidentified Flying
Object Studies is located. It is on
the invitation of that section's
Director, a Dr Walter Kaufman,
that I am making
this trip.



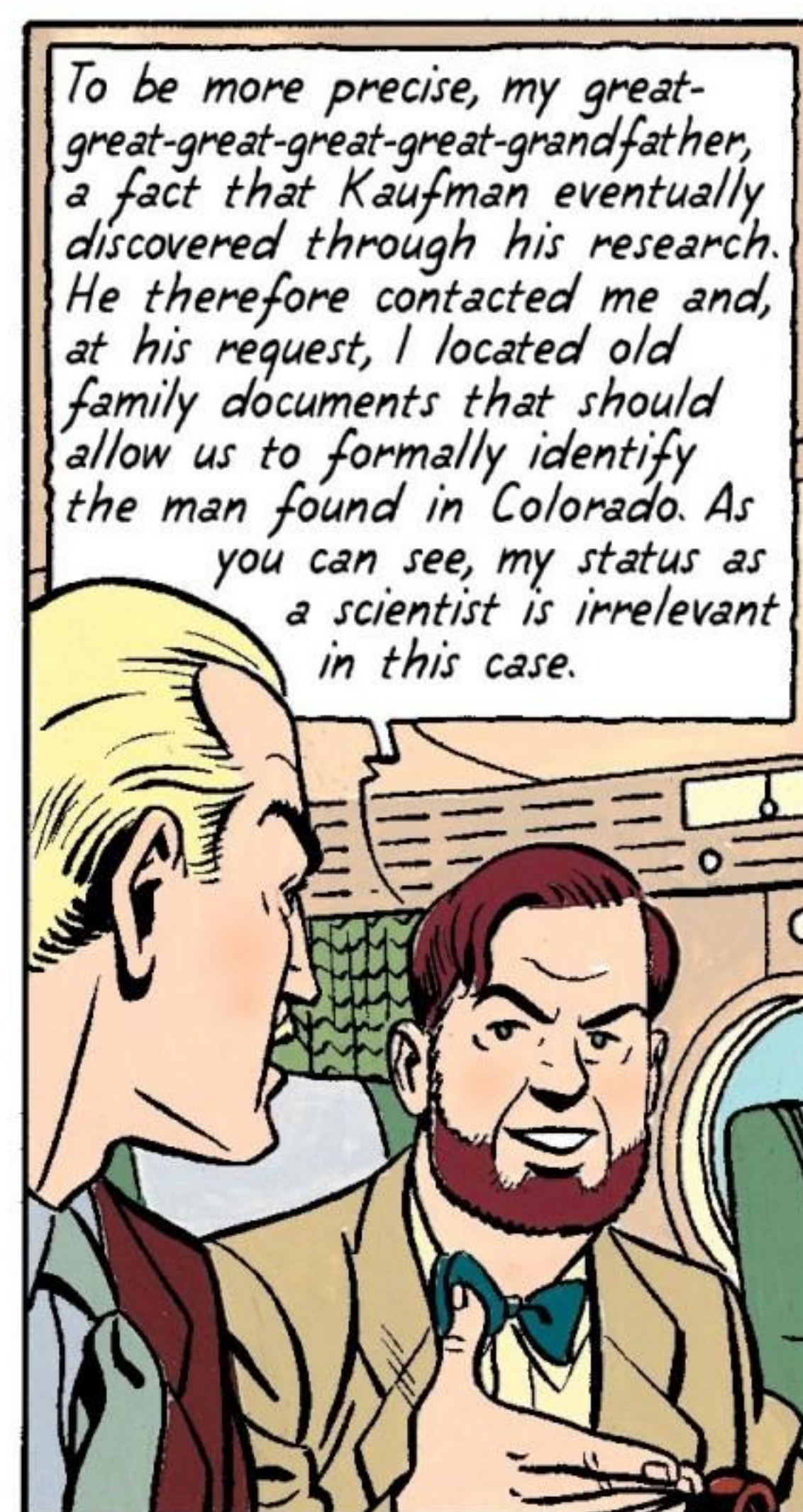
After having analysed the fabric of
the uniform and the leather of the
equipment carried by the corpse, as
well as the type of dental care and
scars from surgery, Kaufman concluded
that it could indeed be a British
officer from the 18th century.
Regimental insignias as well as the
service number embroidered on the
collar gave him the name of Major
Macquarrie, entered as deserter in
1777 on the British army's registers.



Incredible! But how did you get mixed up in
this fantastic story, Philip? Flying saucers
aren't exactly your specialty.



I got mixed up in it through blood,
old chap. Lachlan Macquarrie, the black
sheep of the family, was one of my
ancestors on my mother's side.



To be more precise, my great-
great-great-great-great-grandfather,
a fact that Kaufman eventually
discovered through his research.
He therefore contacted me and,
at his request, I located old
family documents that should
allow us to formally identify
the man found in Colorado. As
you can see, my status as
a scientist is irrelevant
in this case.



BUT THE STEWARDESS
INTERRUPTS MORTIMER'S
EXPLANATIONS.

Would you please fasten your seatbelts, gentlemen.
We'll be at Idlewild in a few minutes.

Well, not a minute too soon. I have to admit
I would very much like to smoke a nice pipe
on good old solid ground.

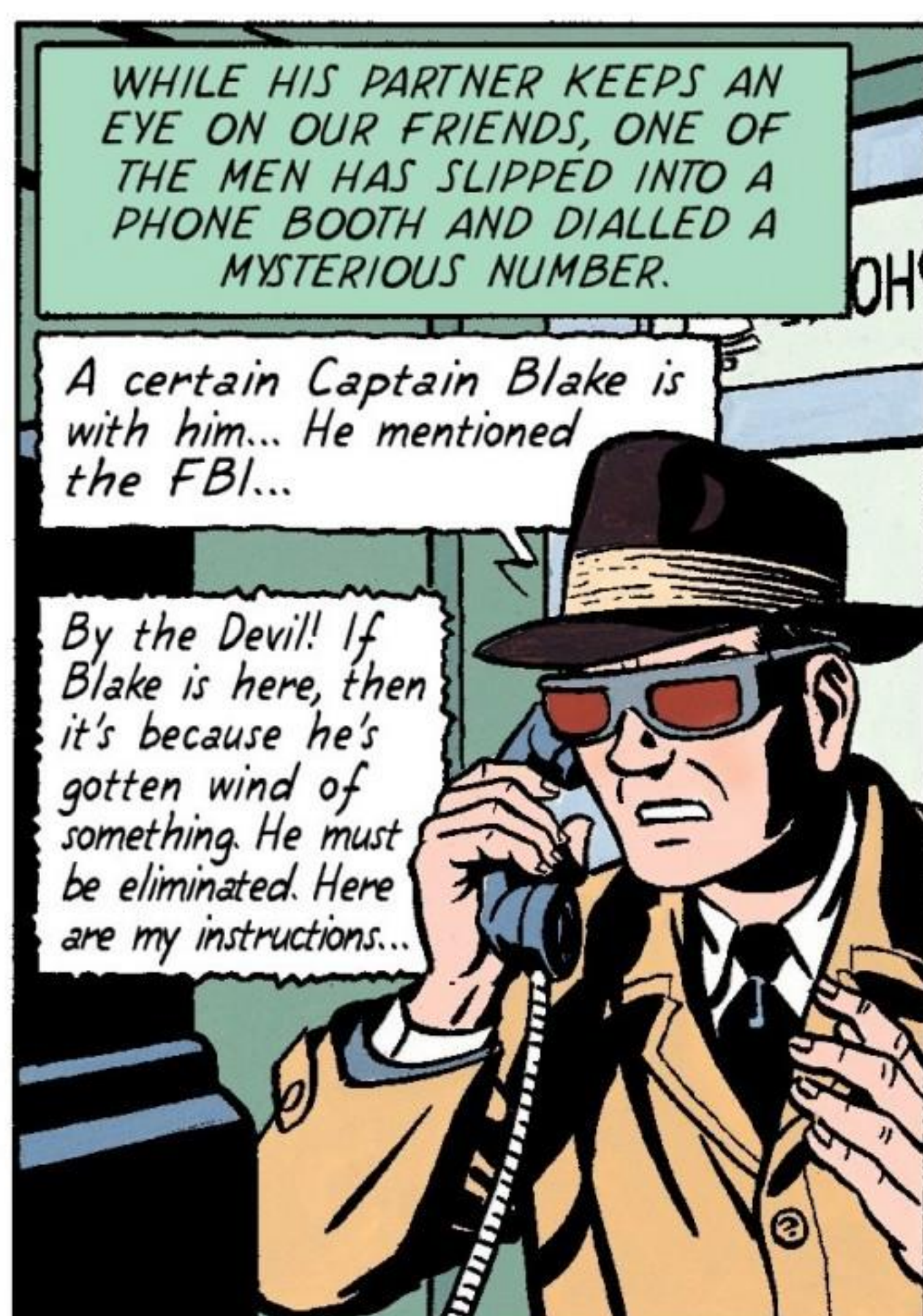
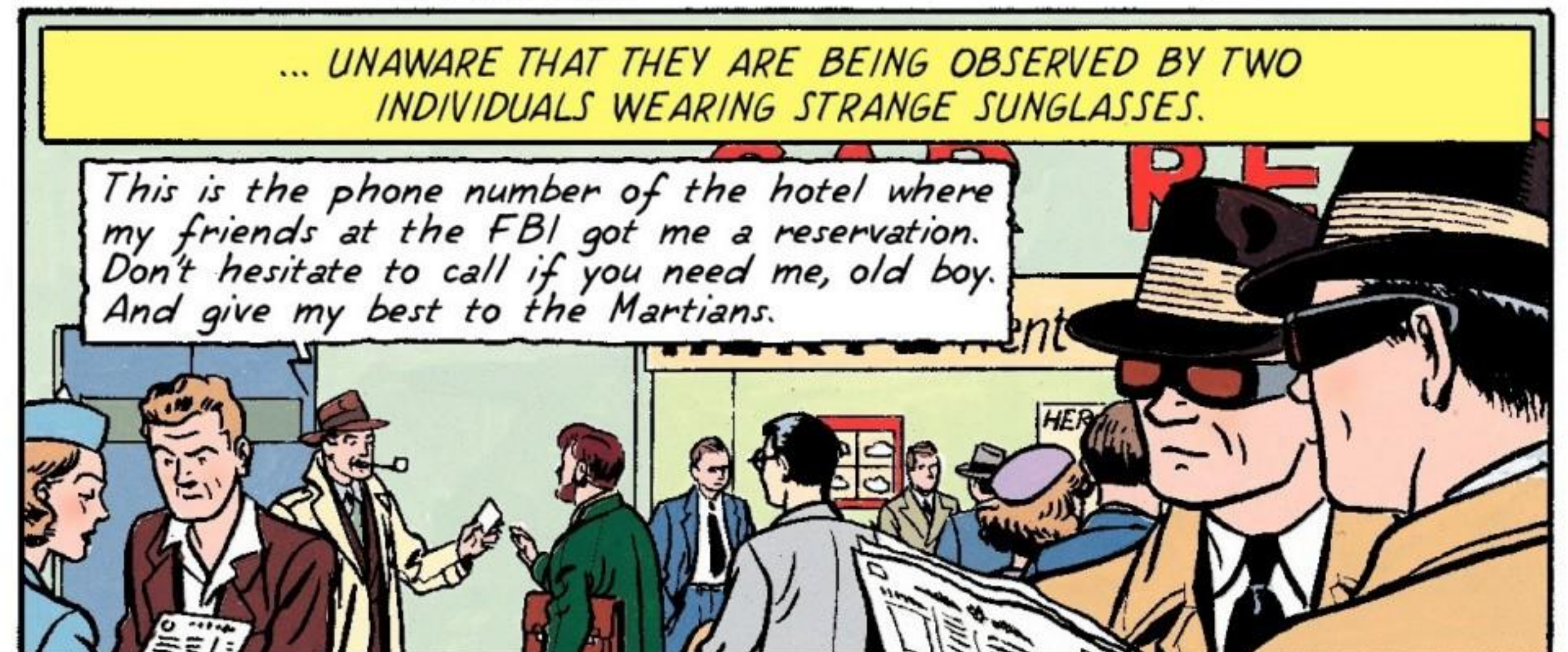
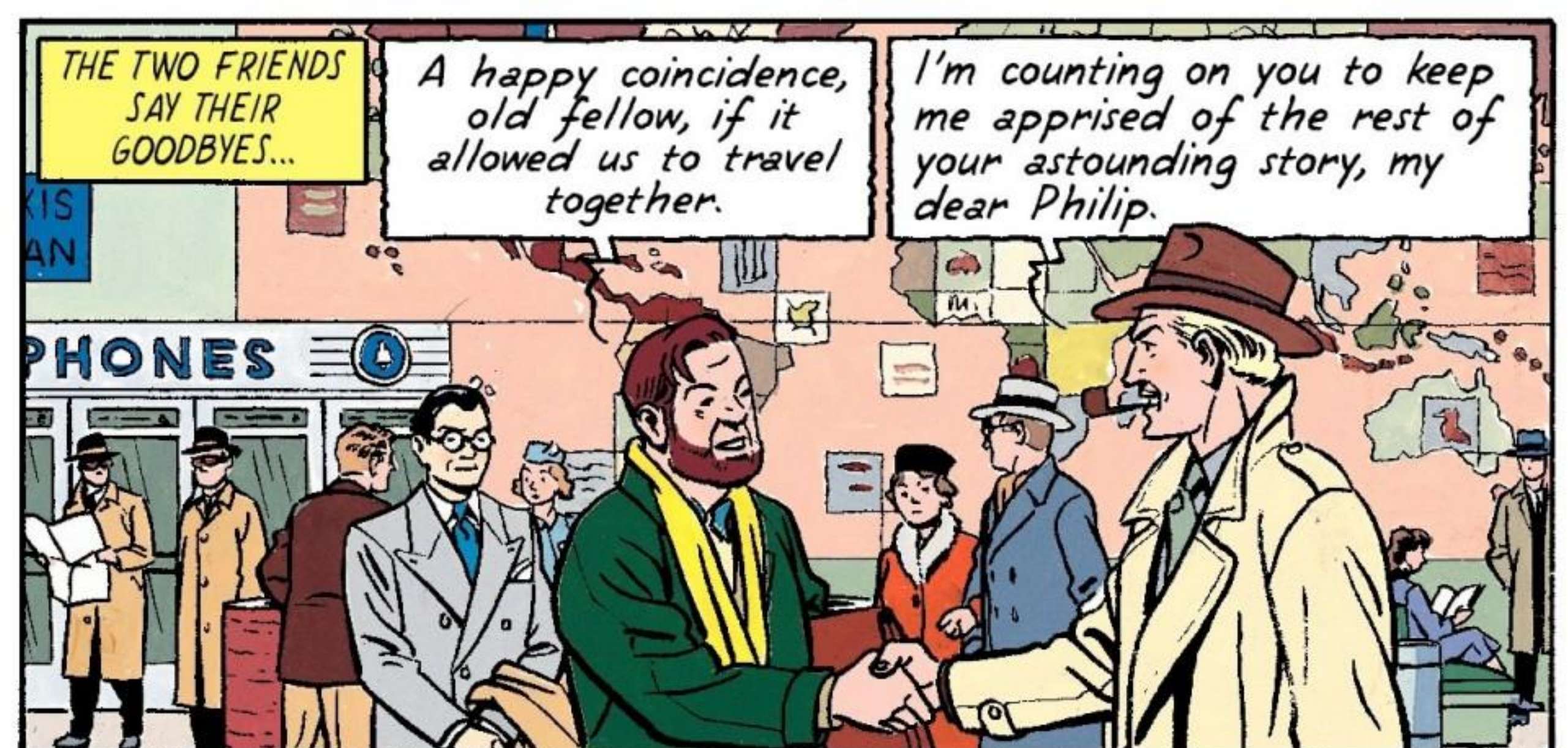
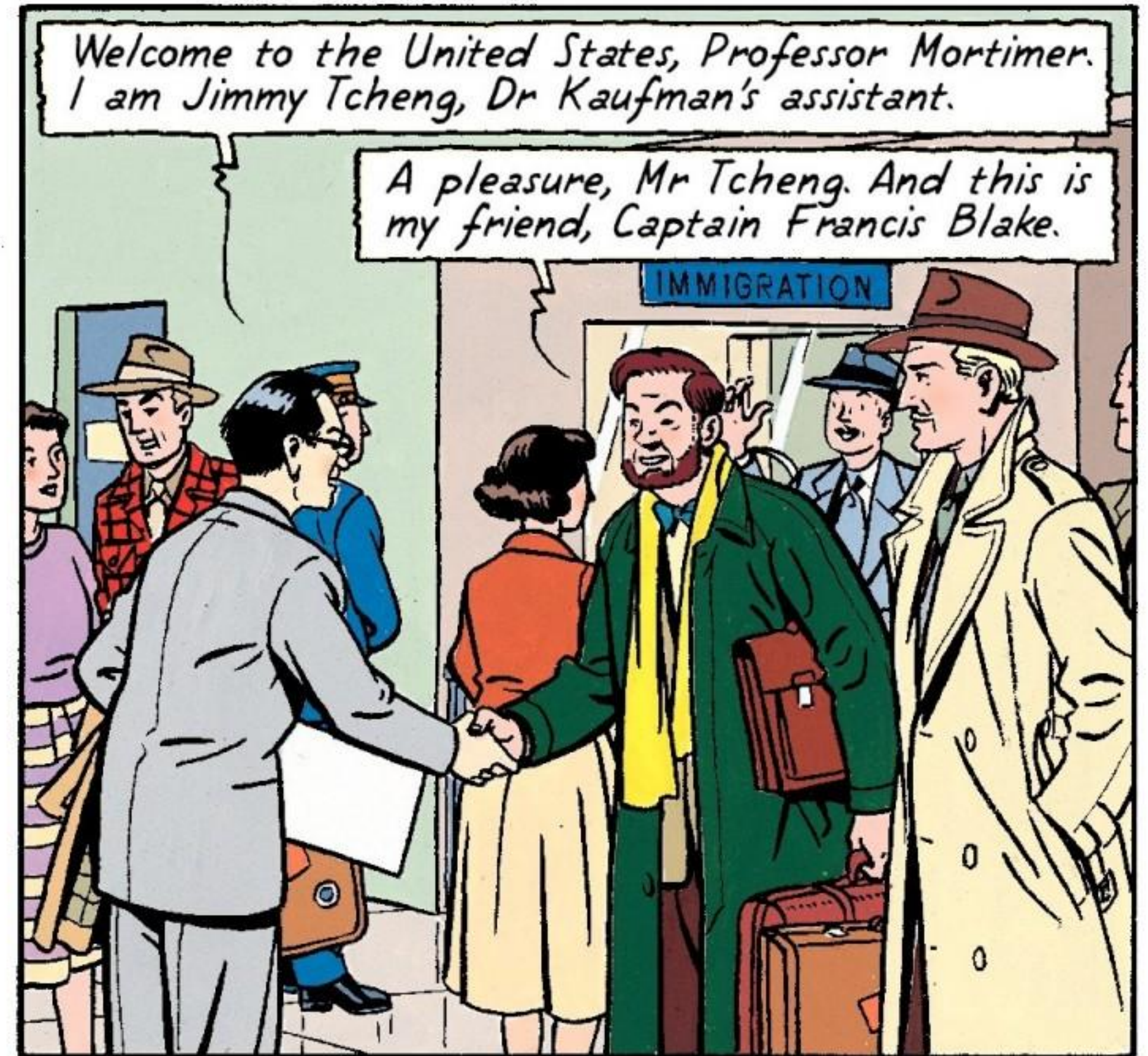
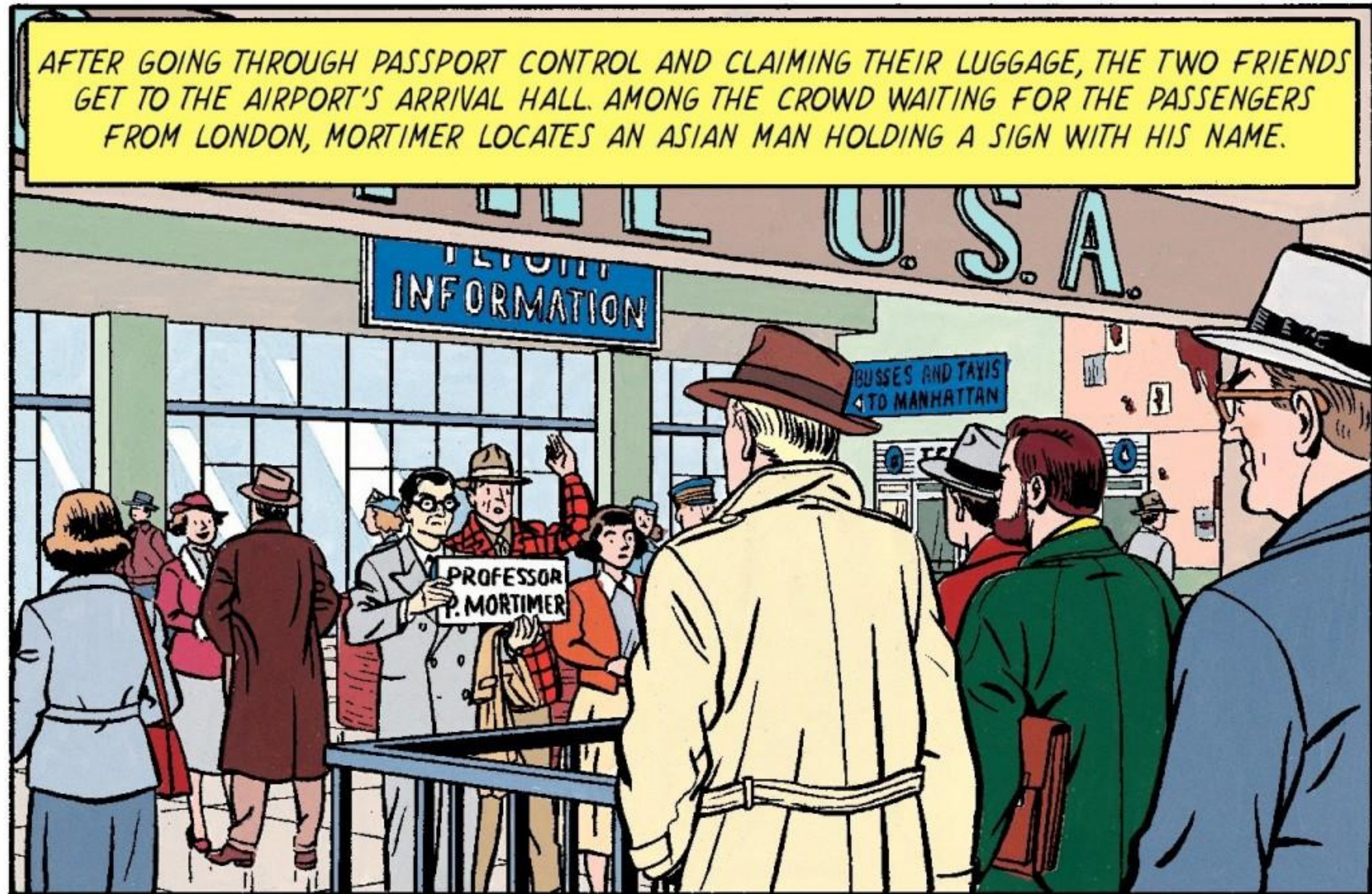


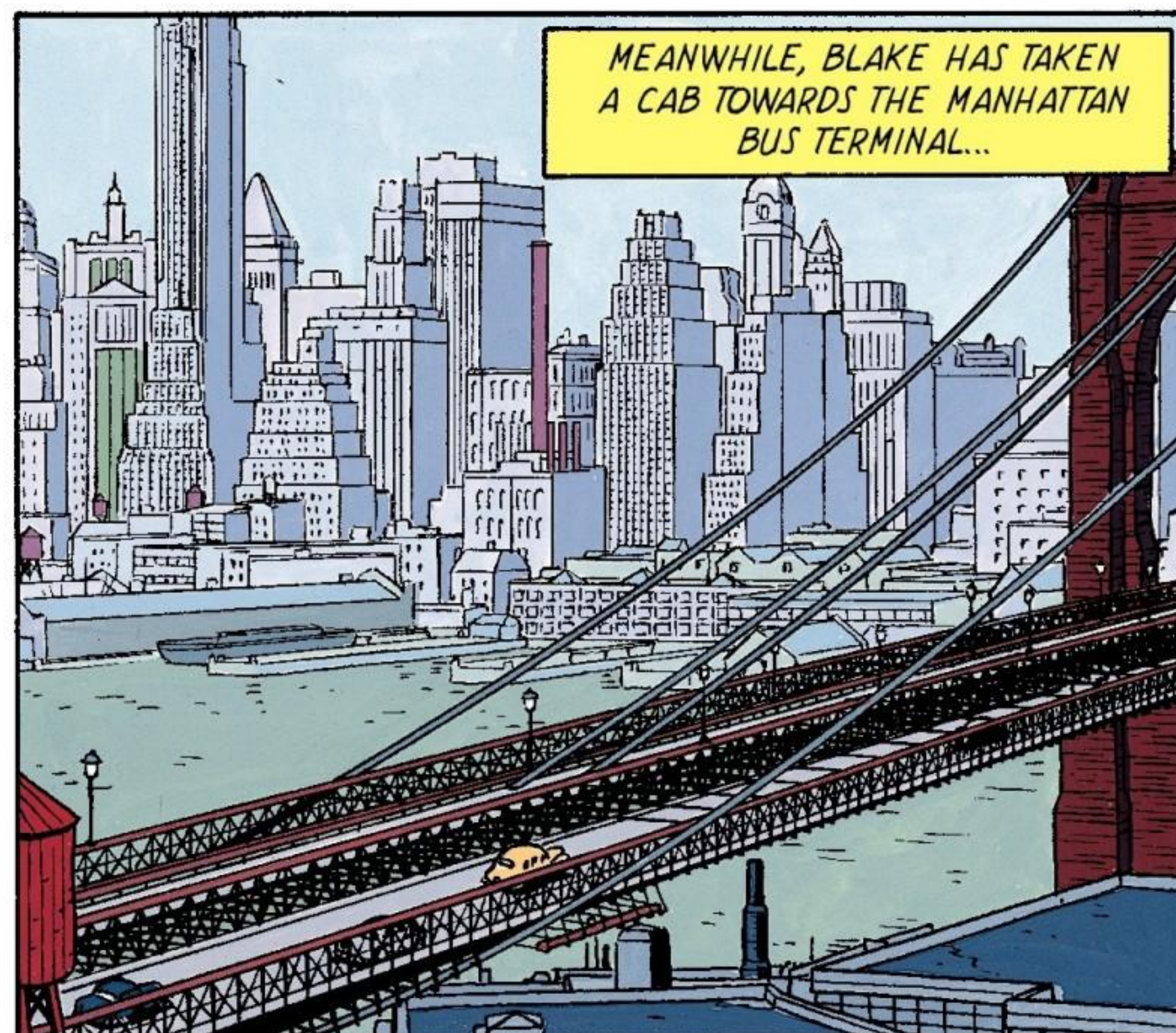
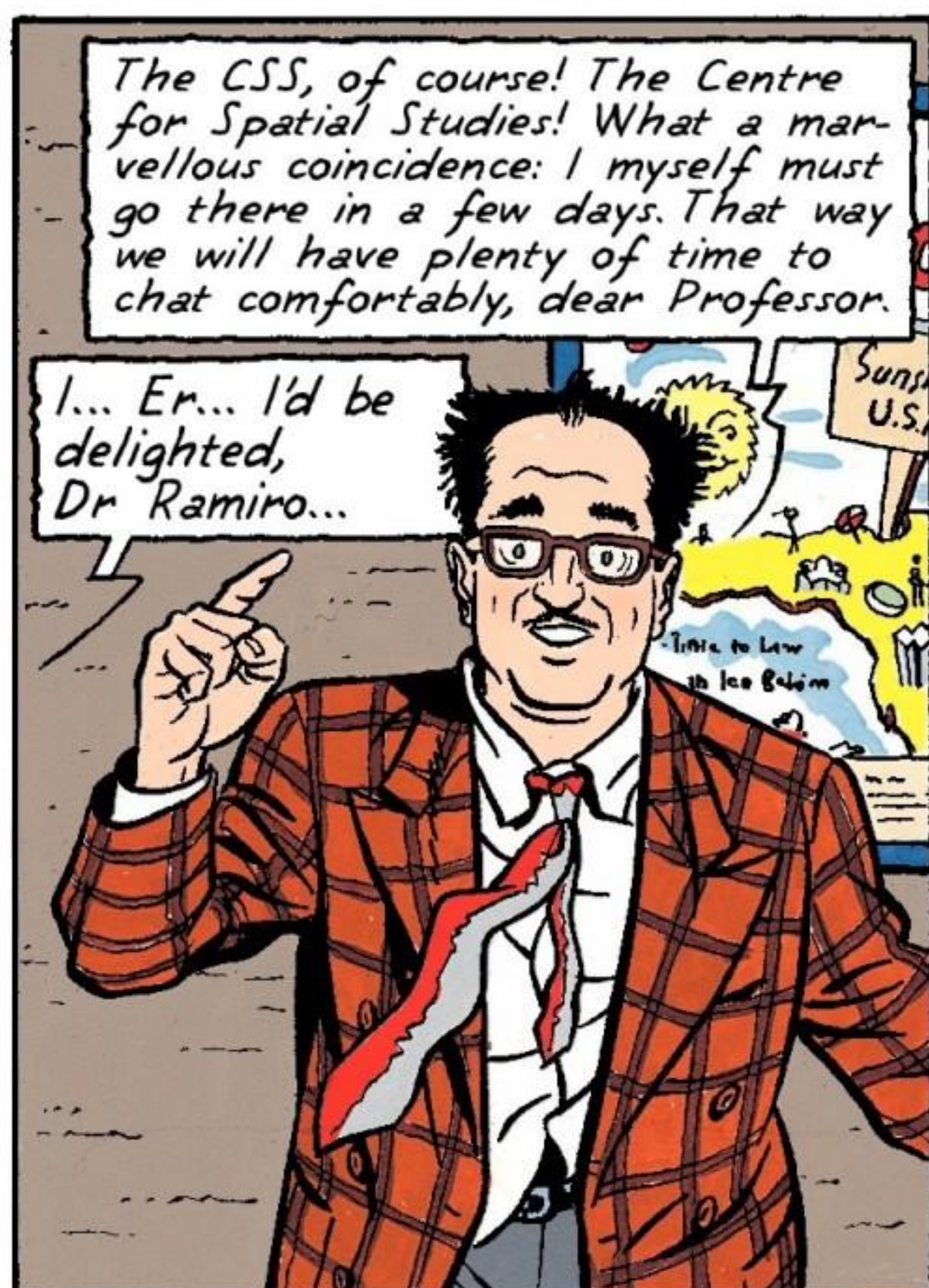
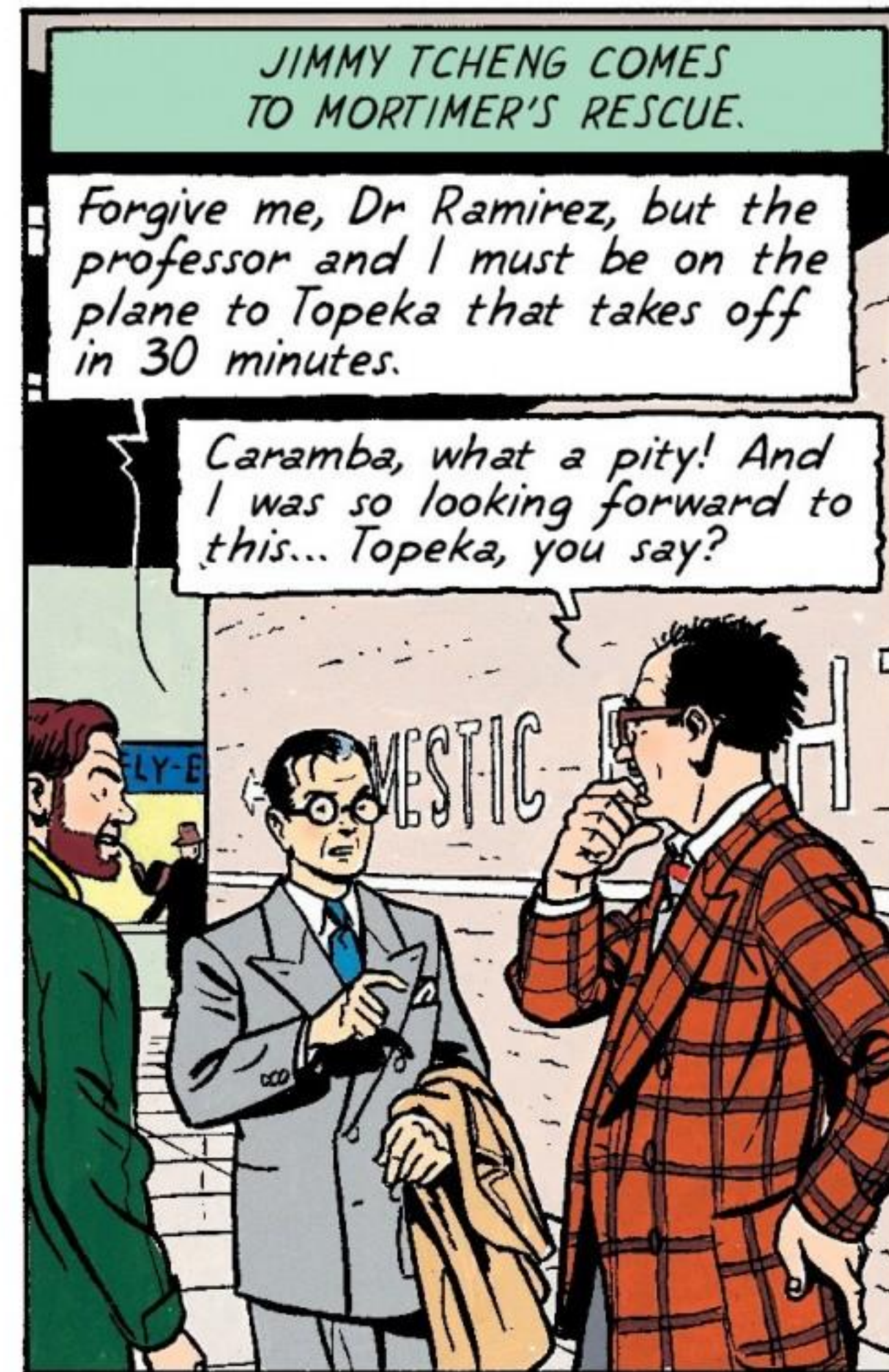
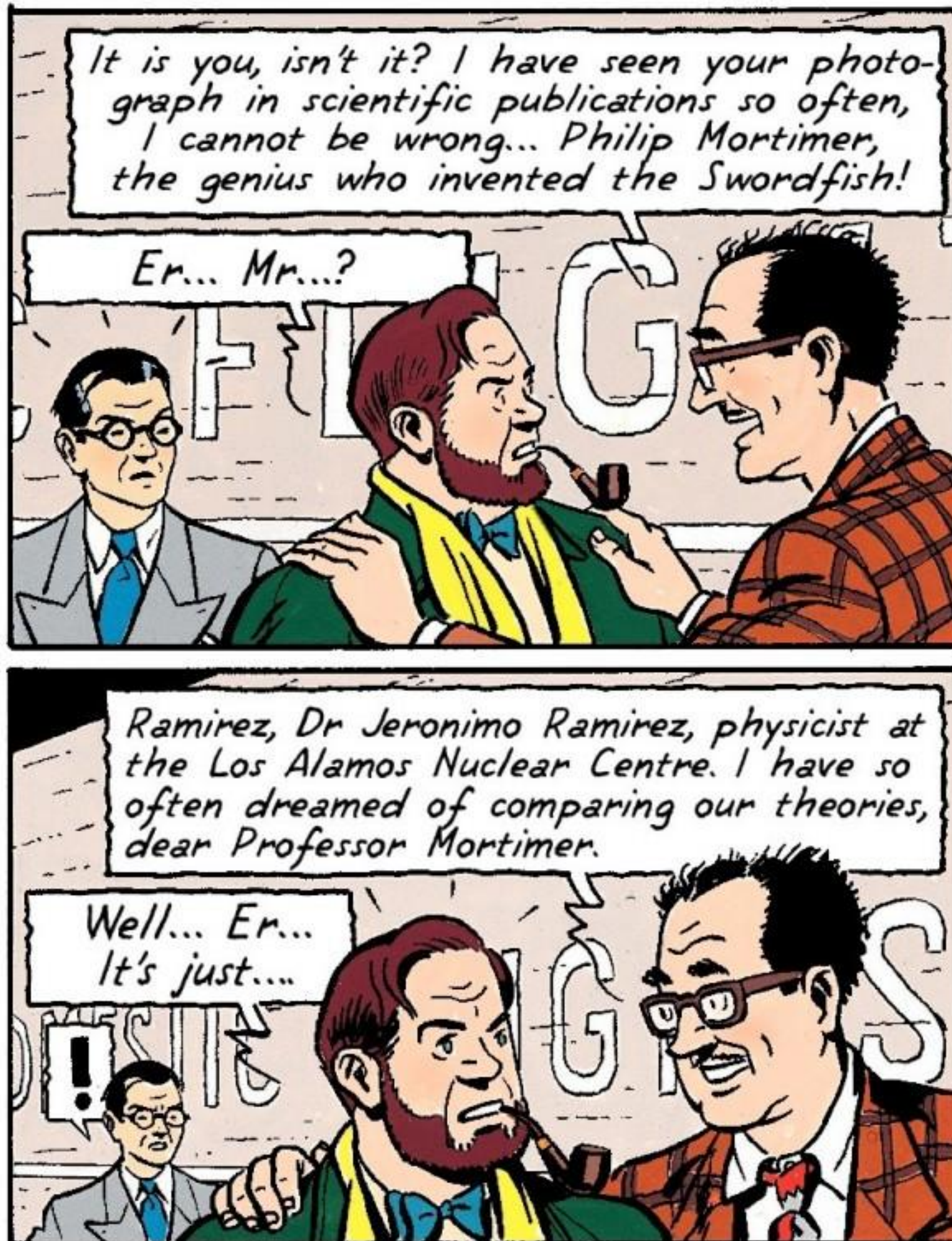
The trip would have been a lot
faster aboard the Golden
Rocket, old chap.

Bah... You'll see: Soon all commercial
airplanes will have jet engines!

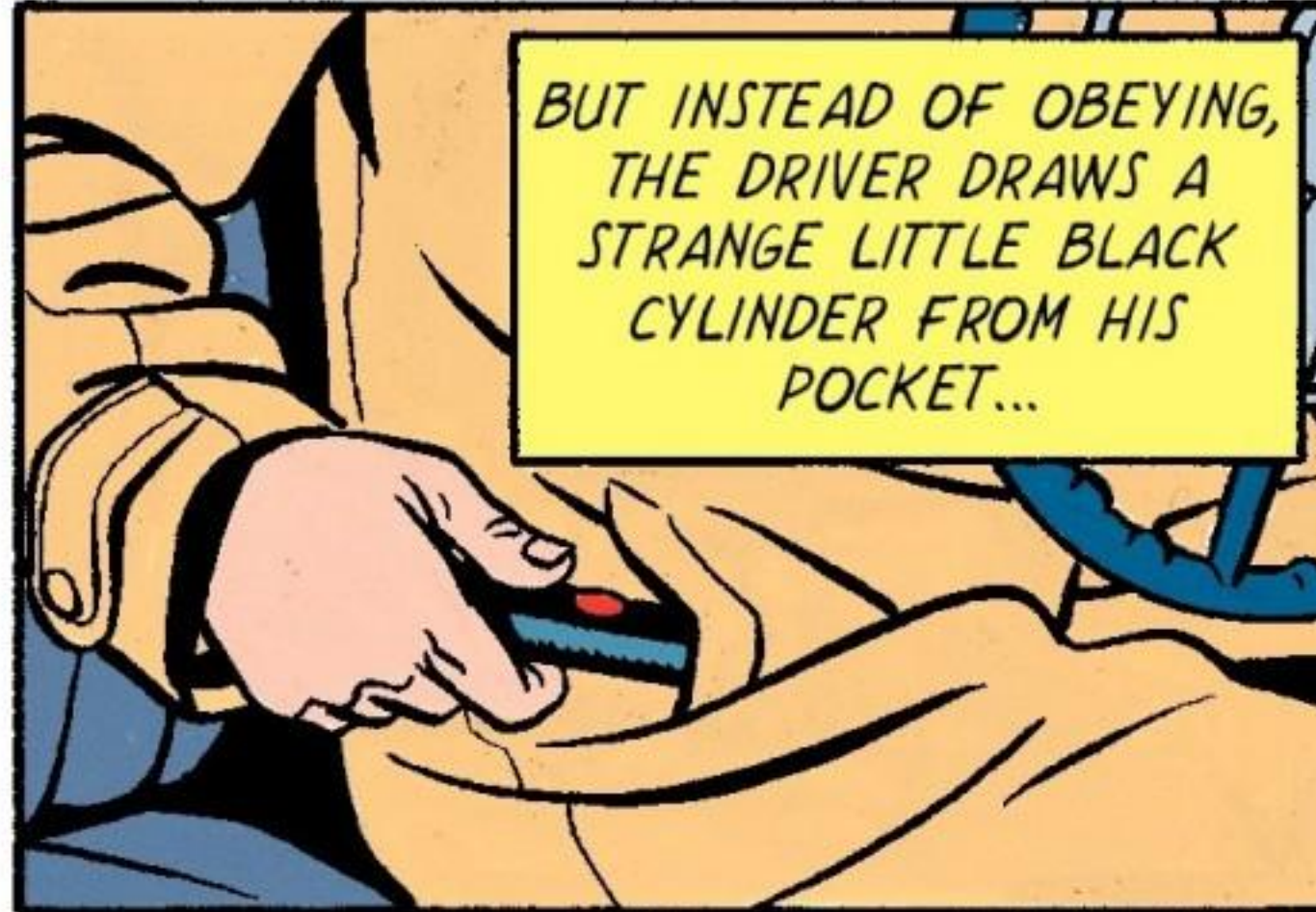
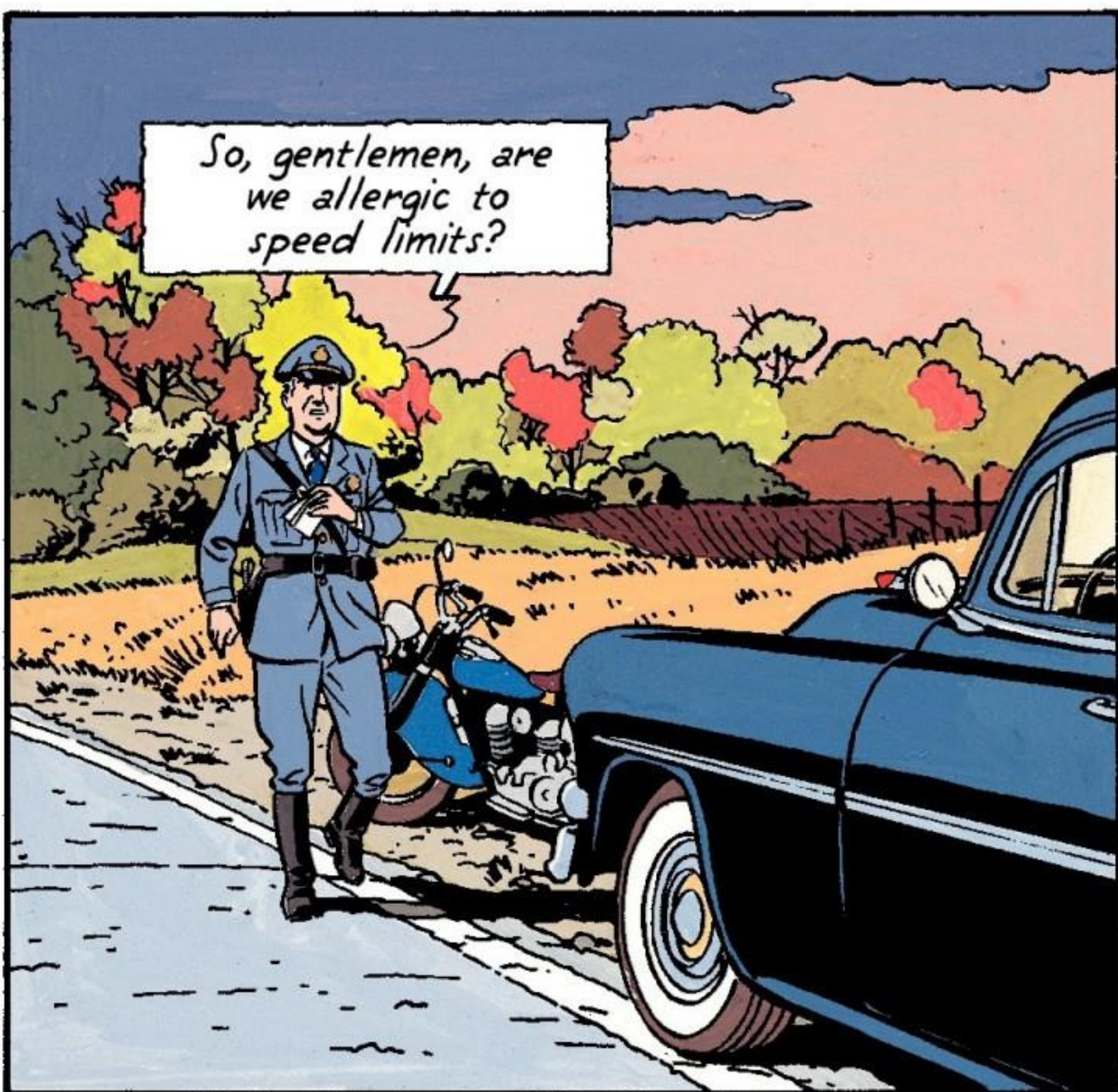
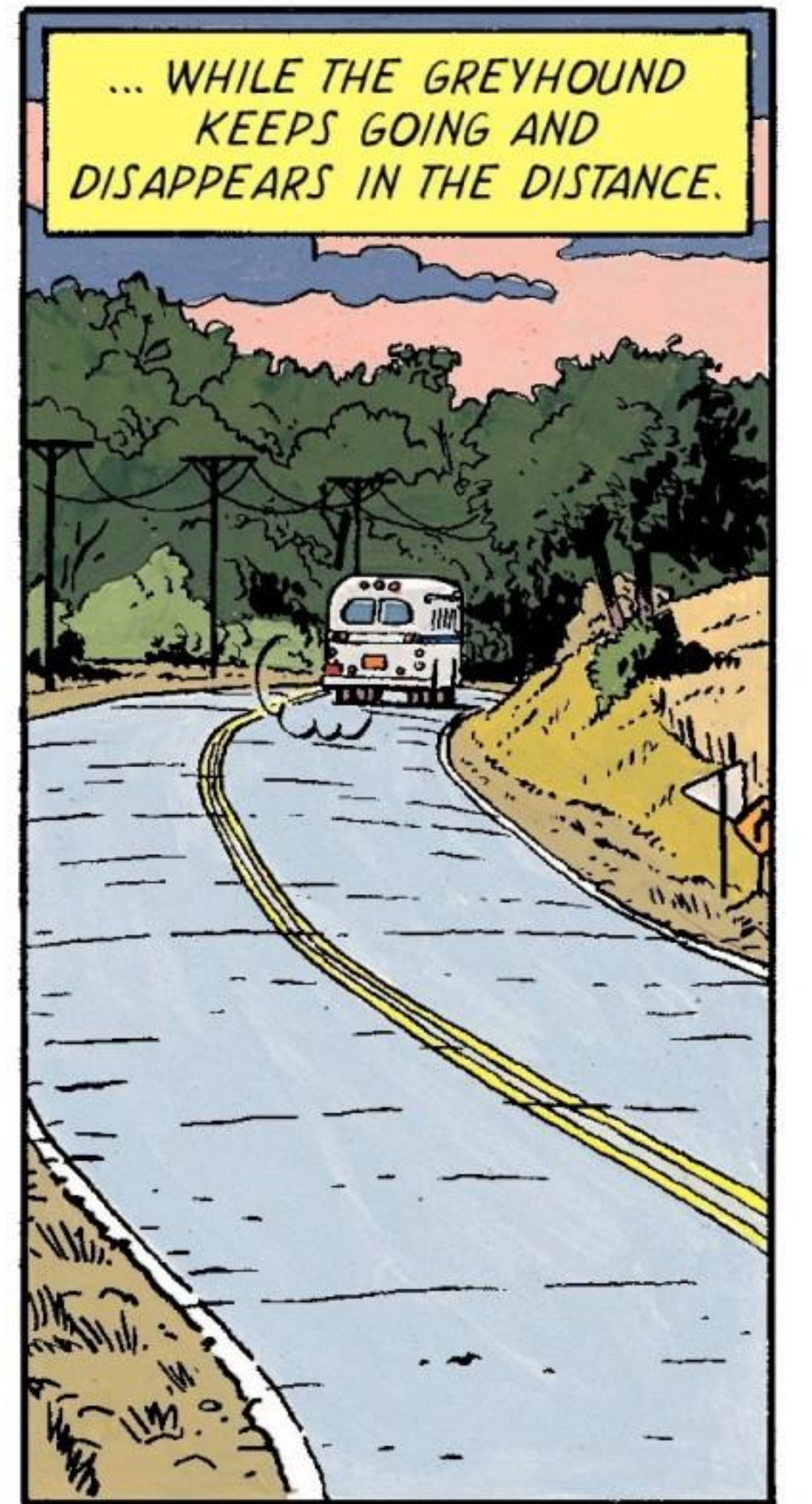
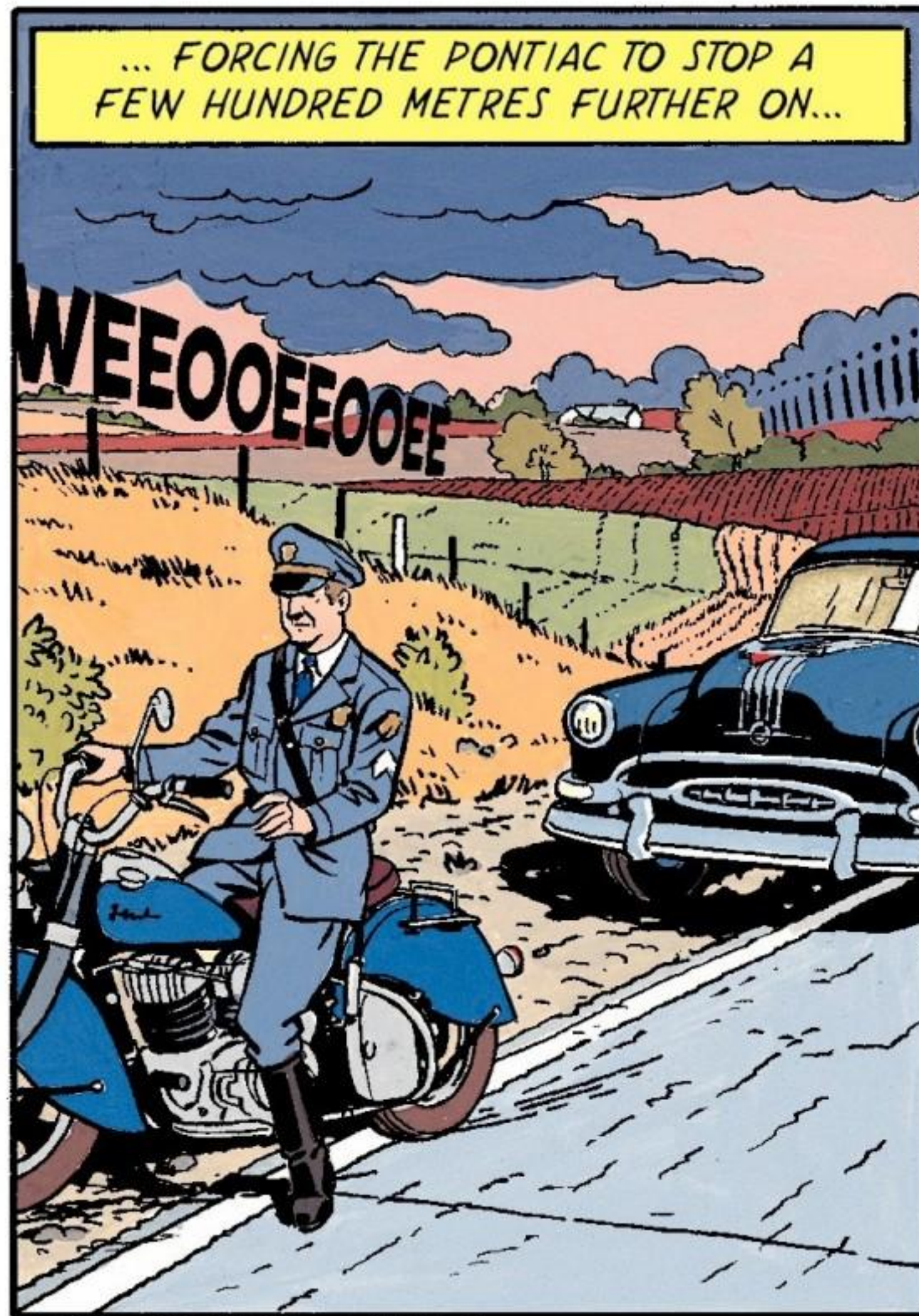
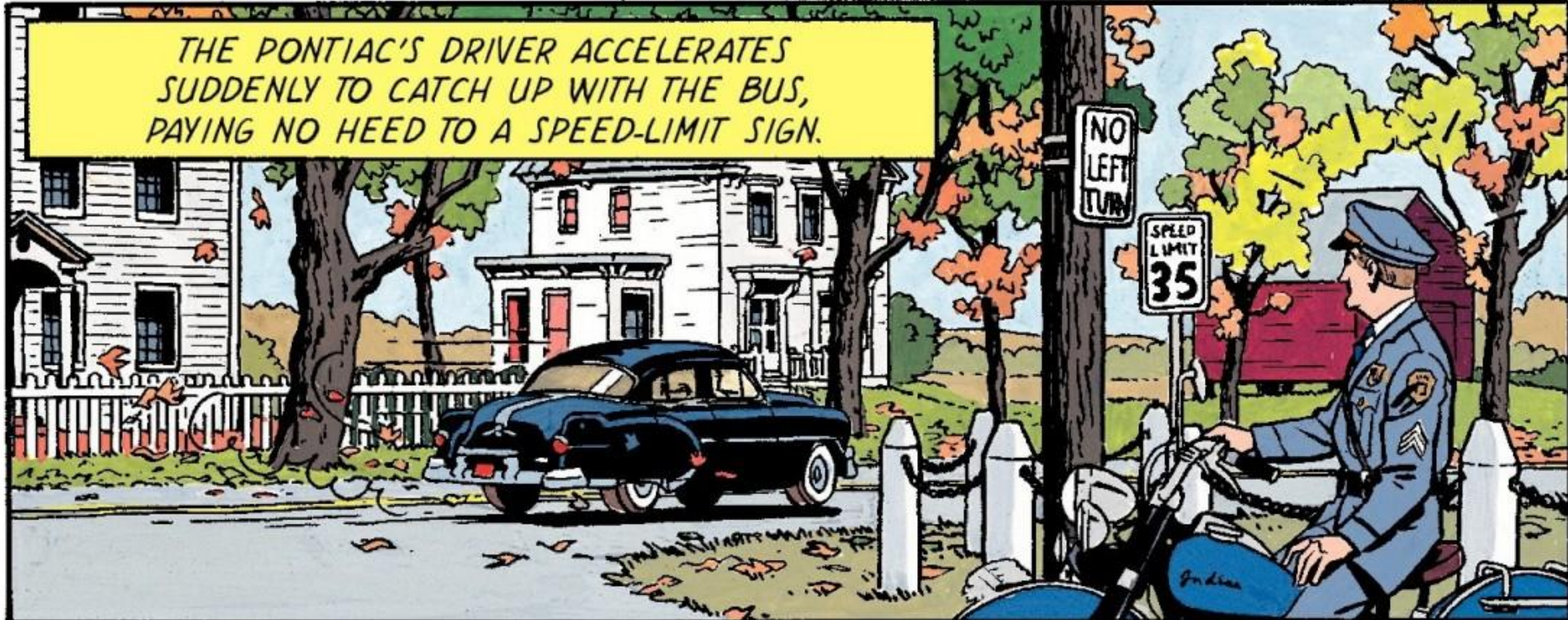
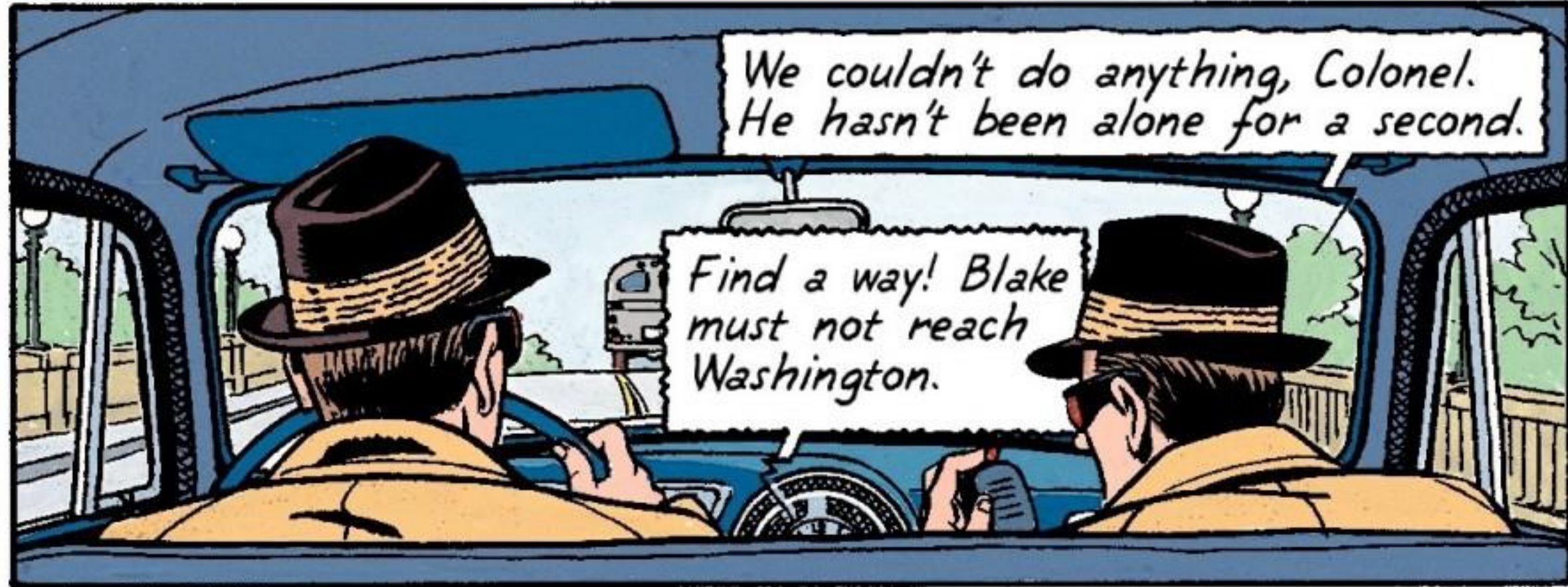


A SHORT WHILE LATER, THE STRATOCRUISER
LANDS SAFELY ON RUNWAY 3 OF NEW YORK'S
GIGANTIC AIRPORT.

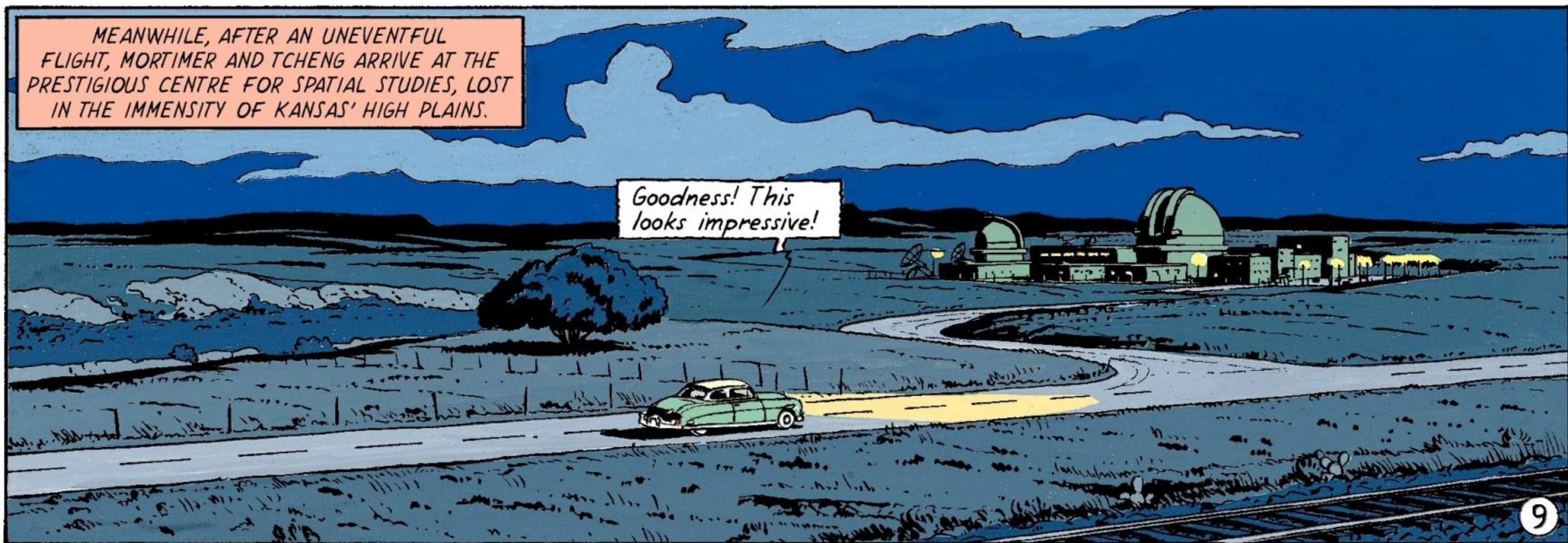
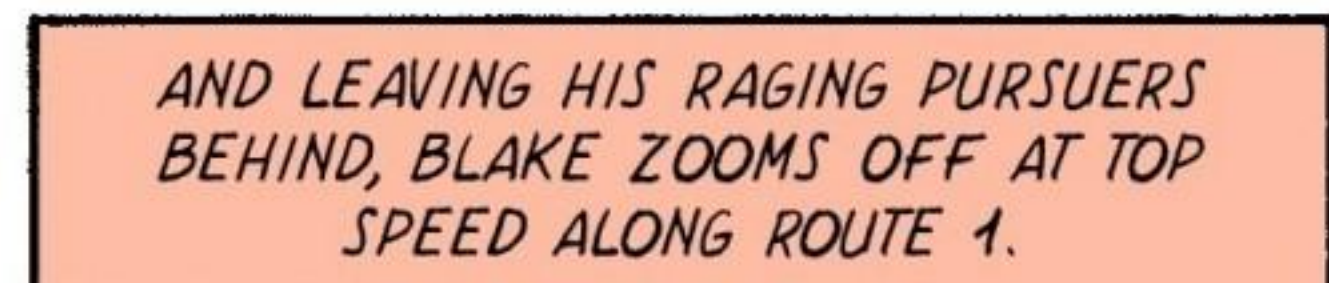
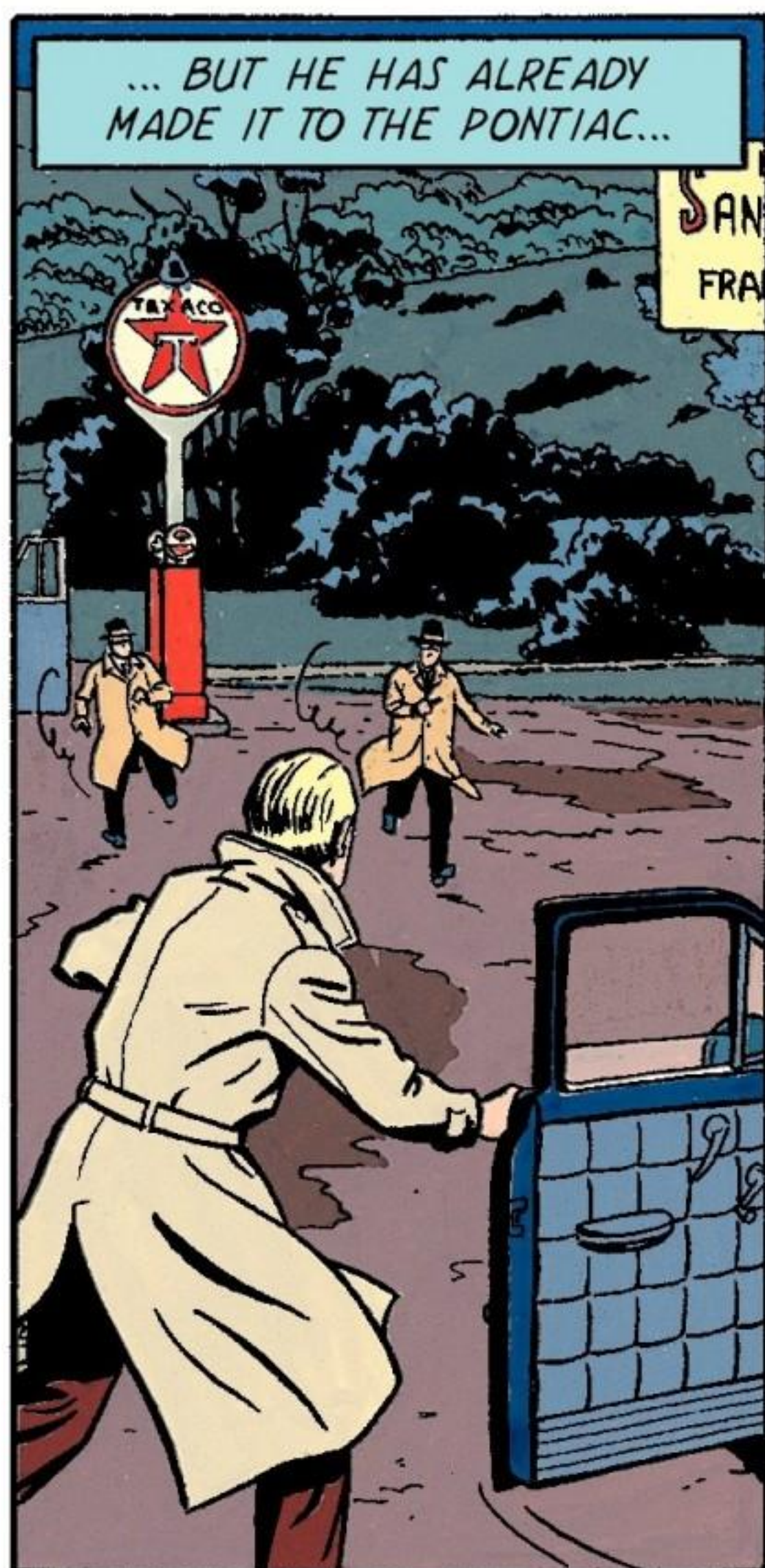
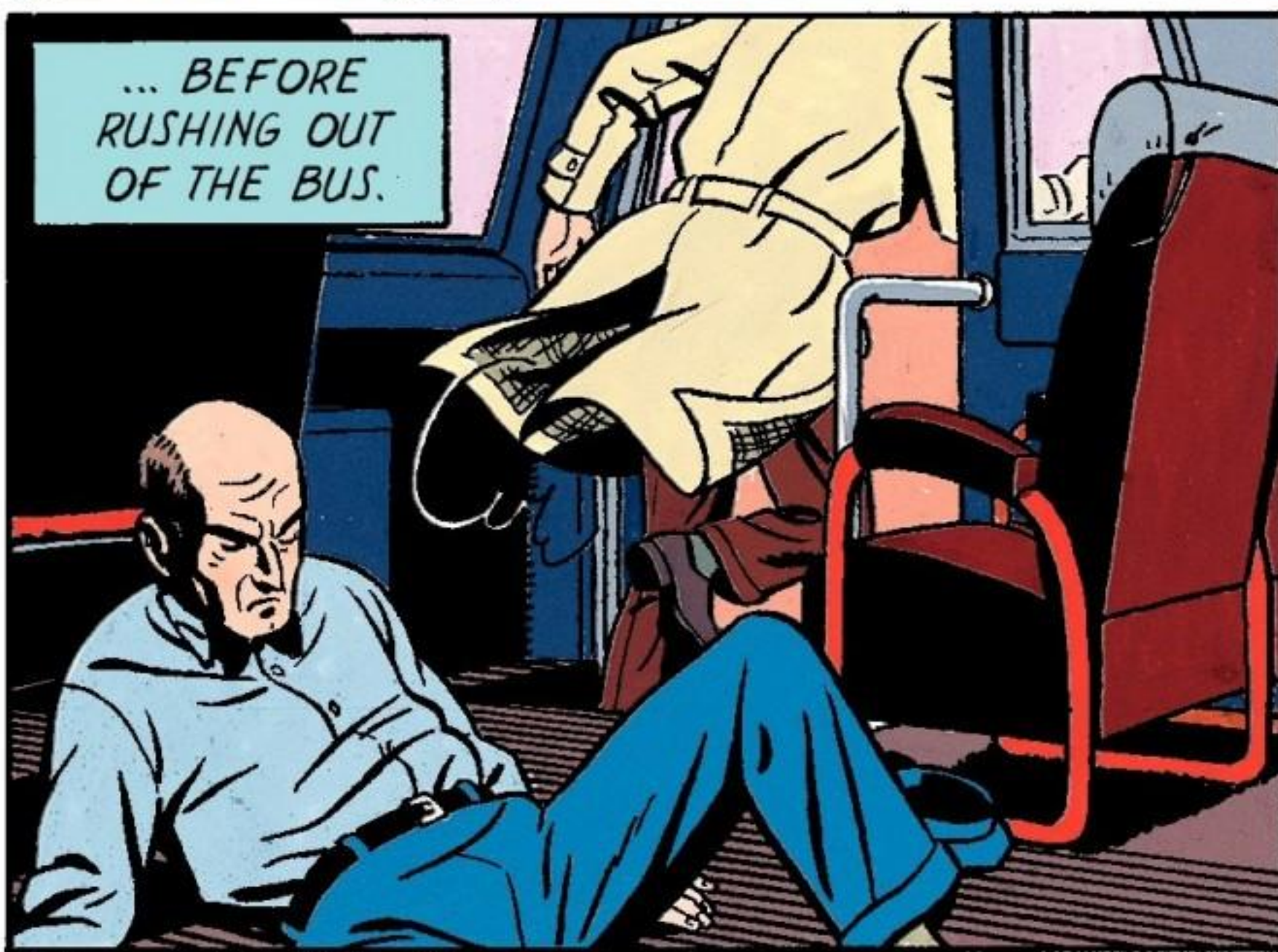


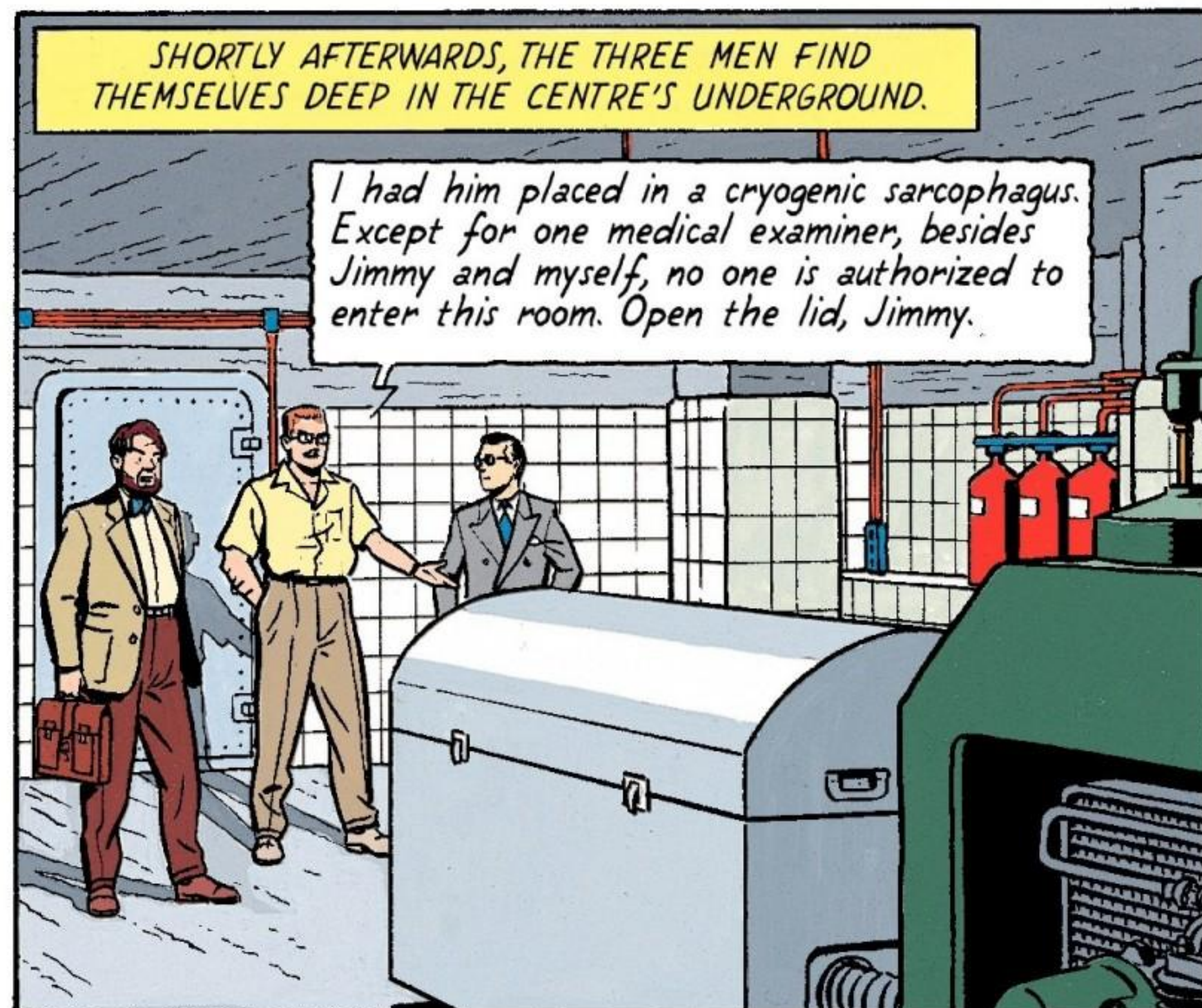
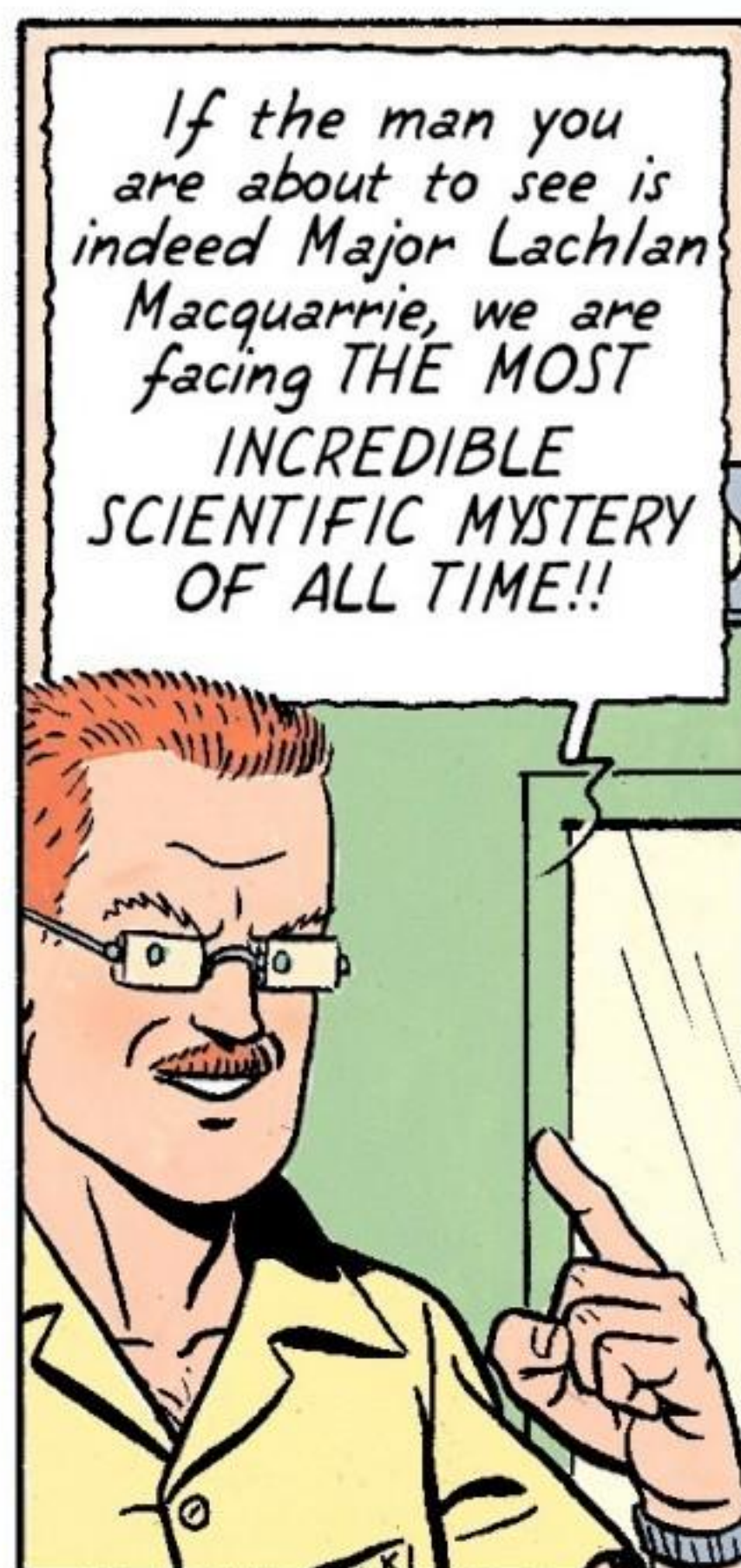
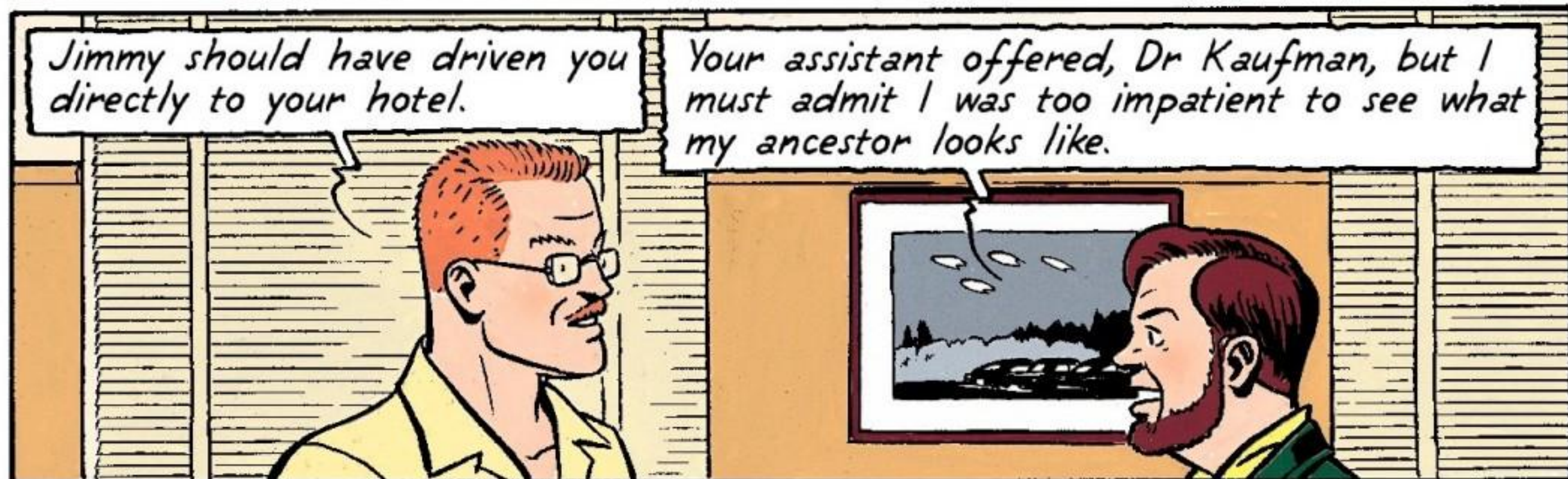
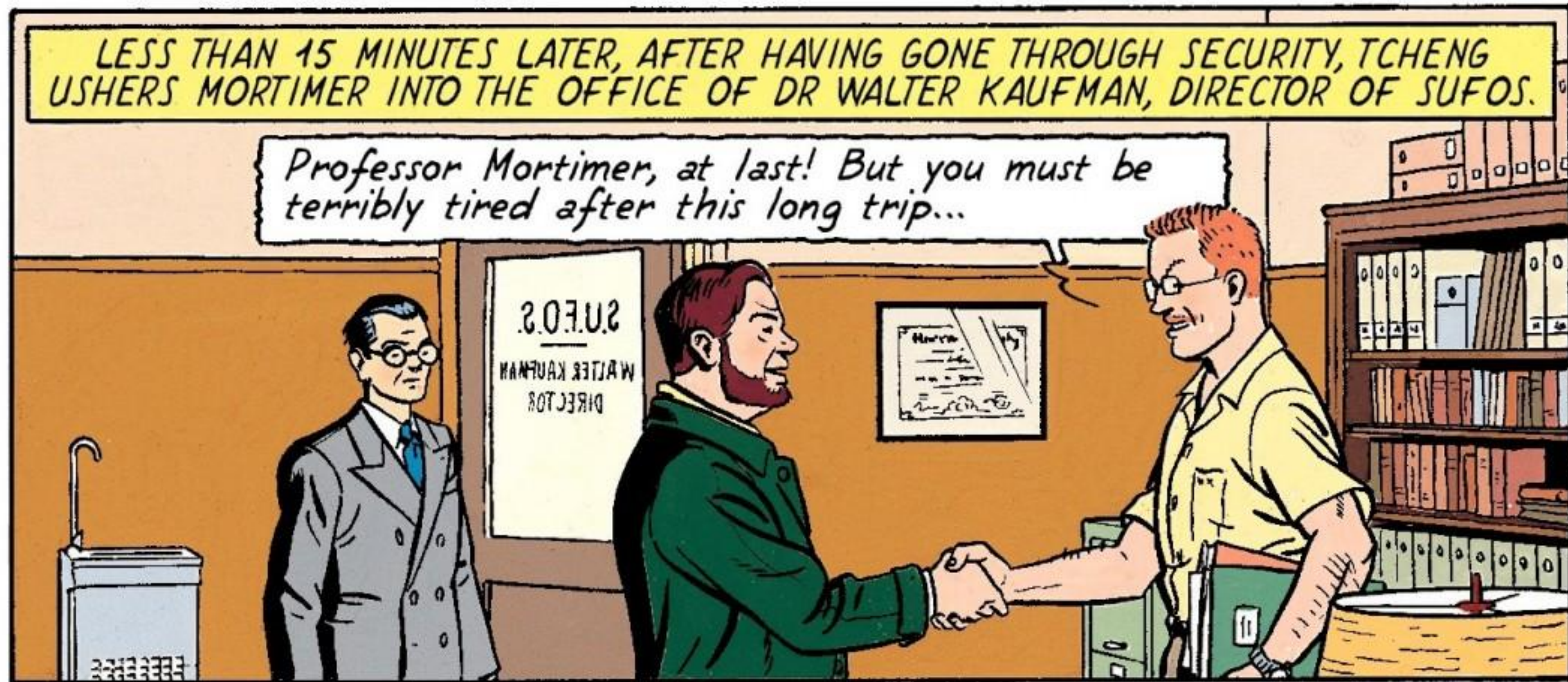


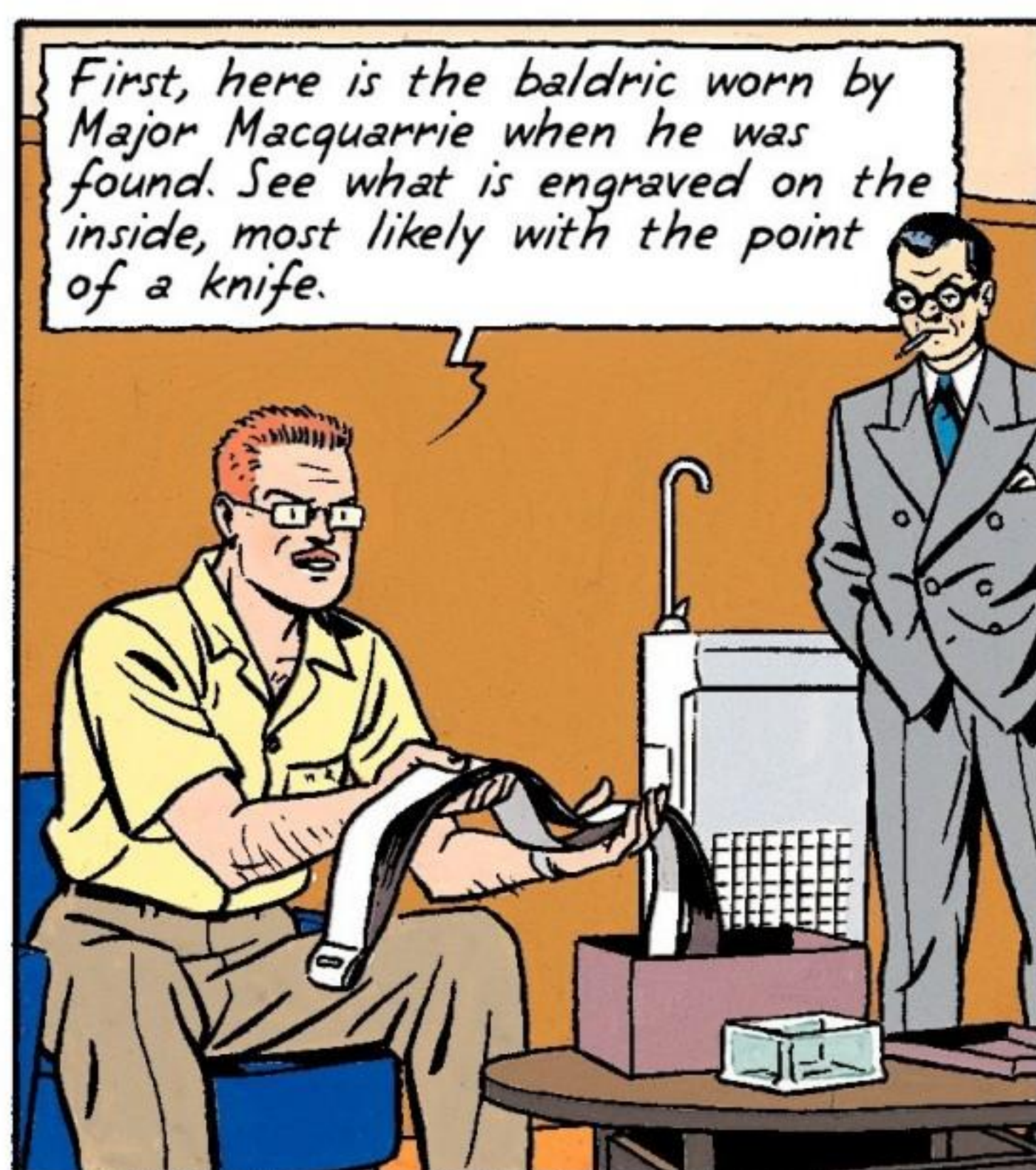
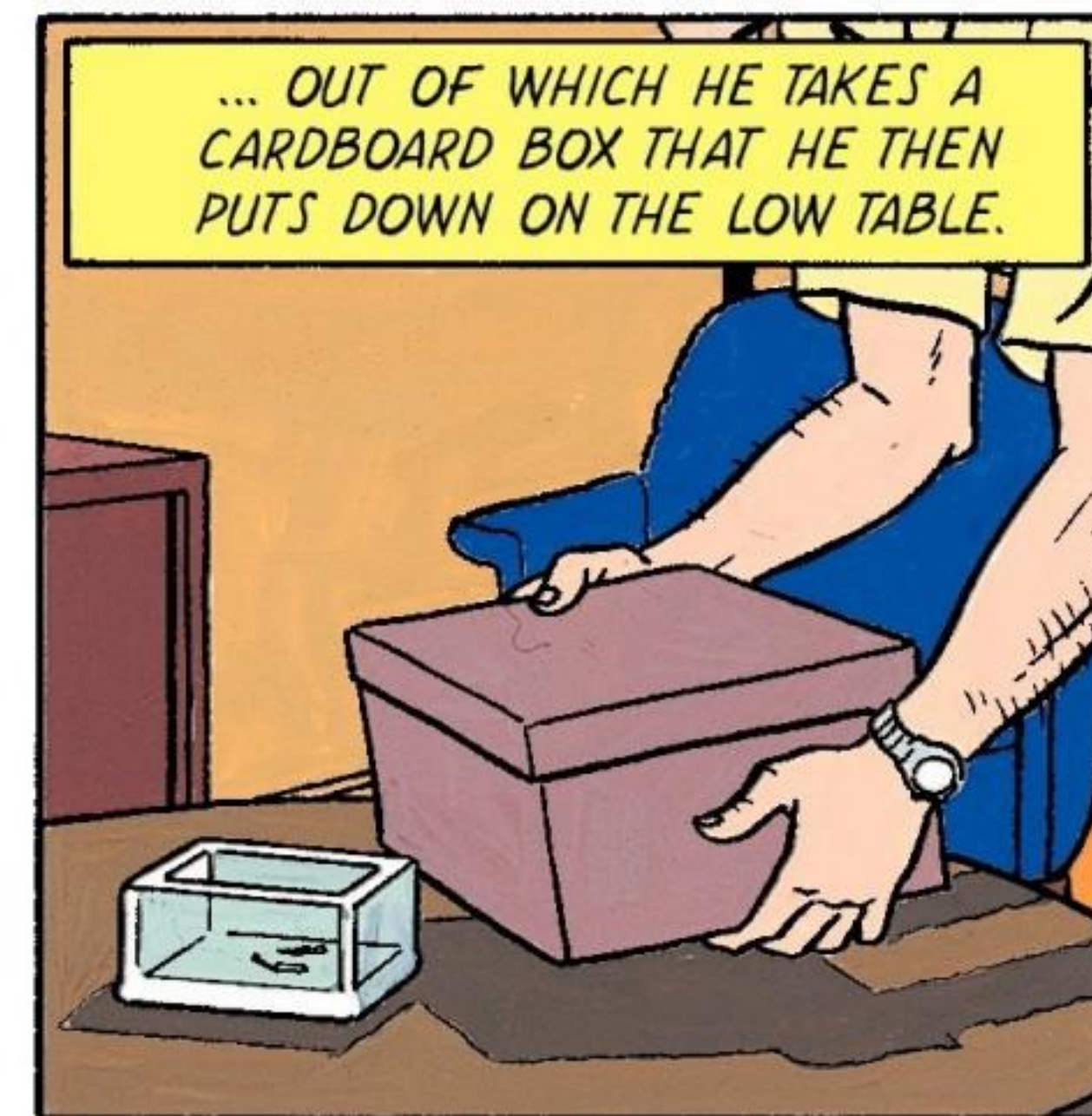
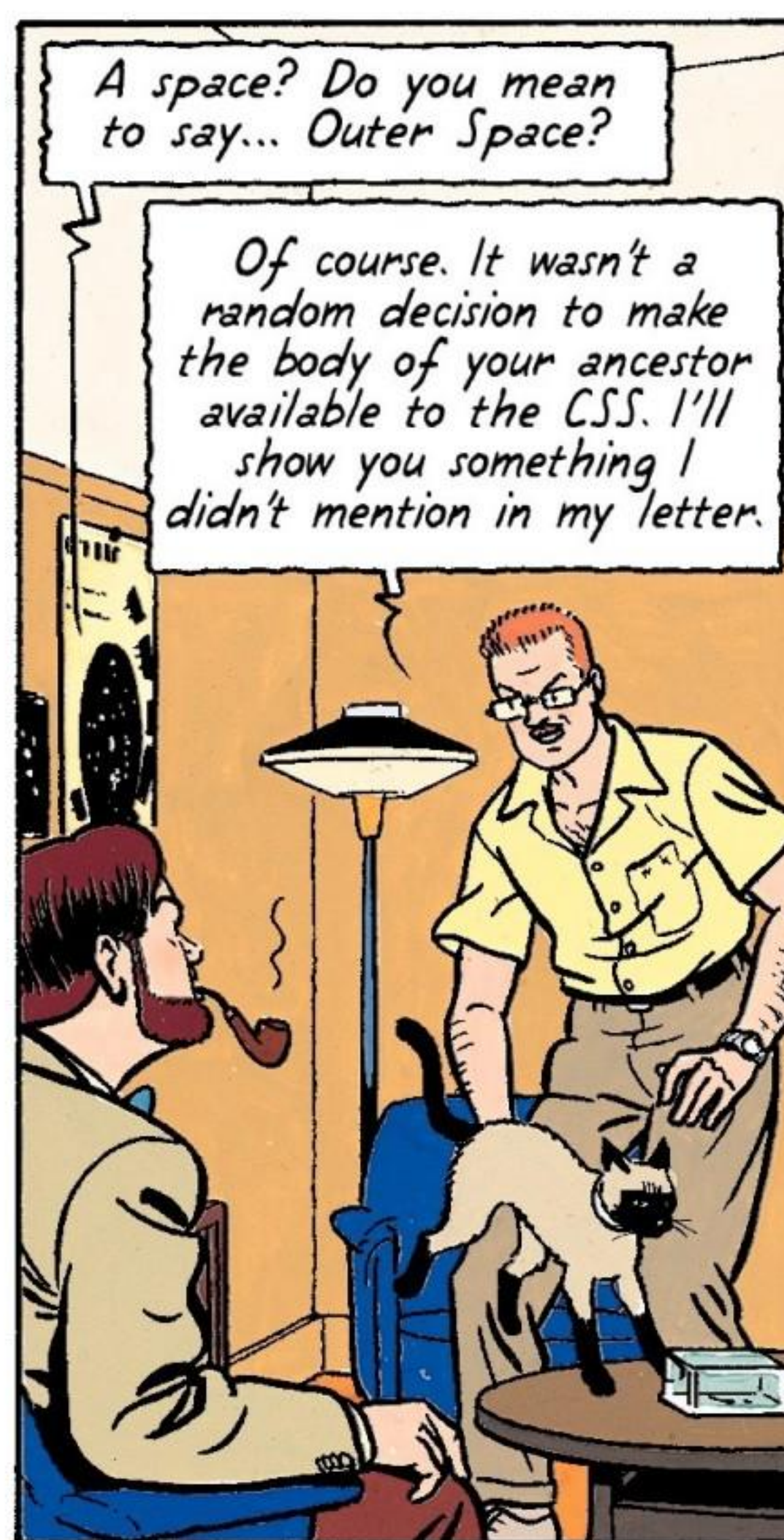
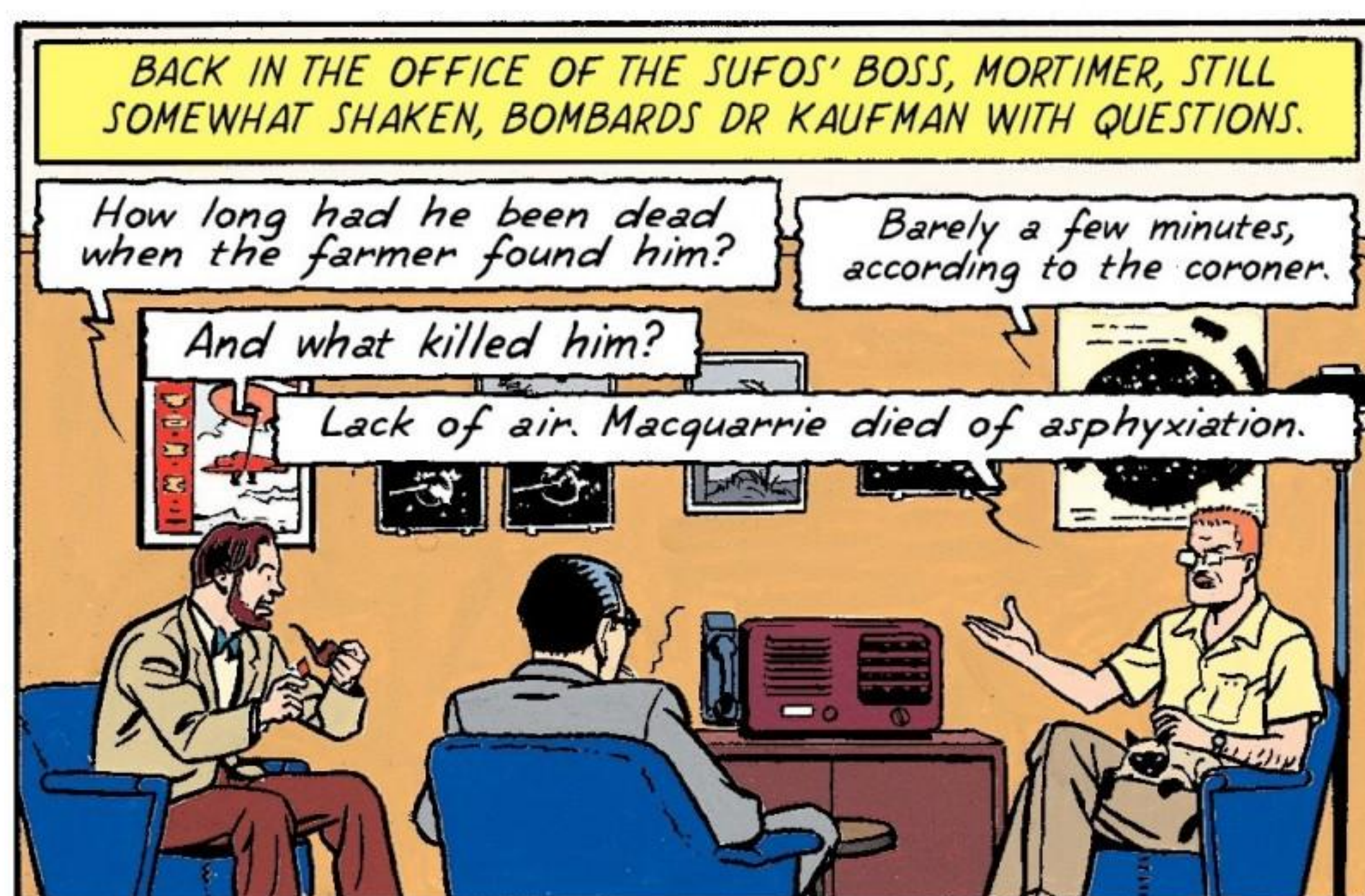
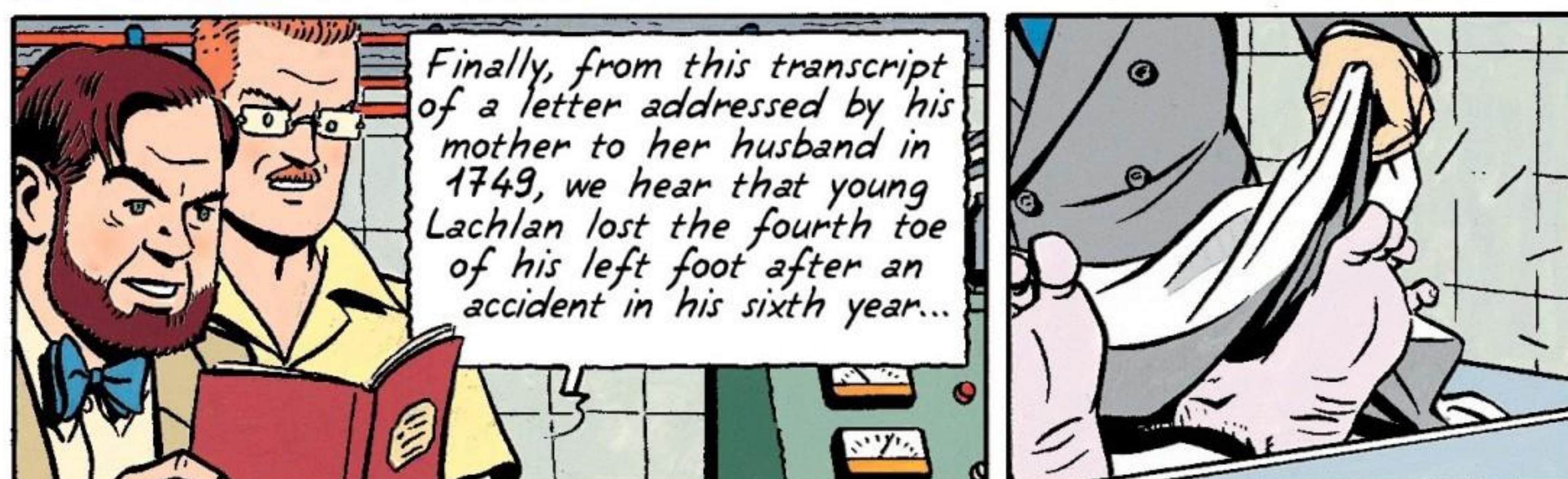
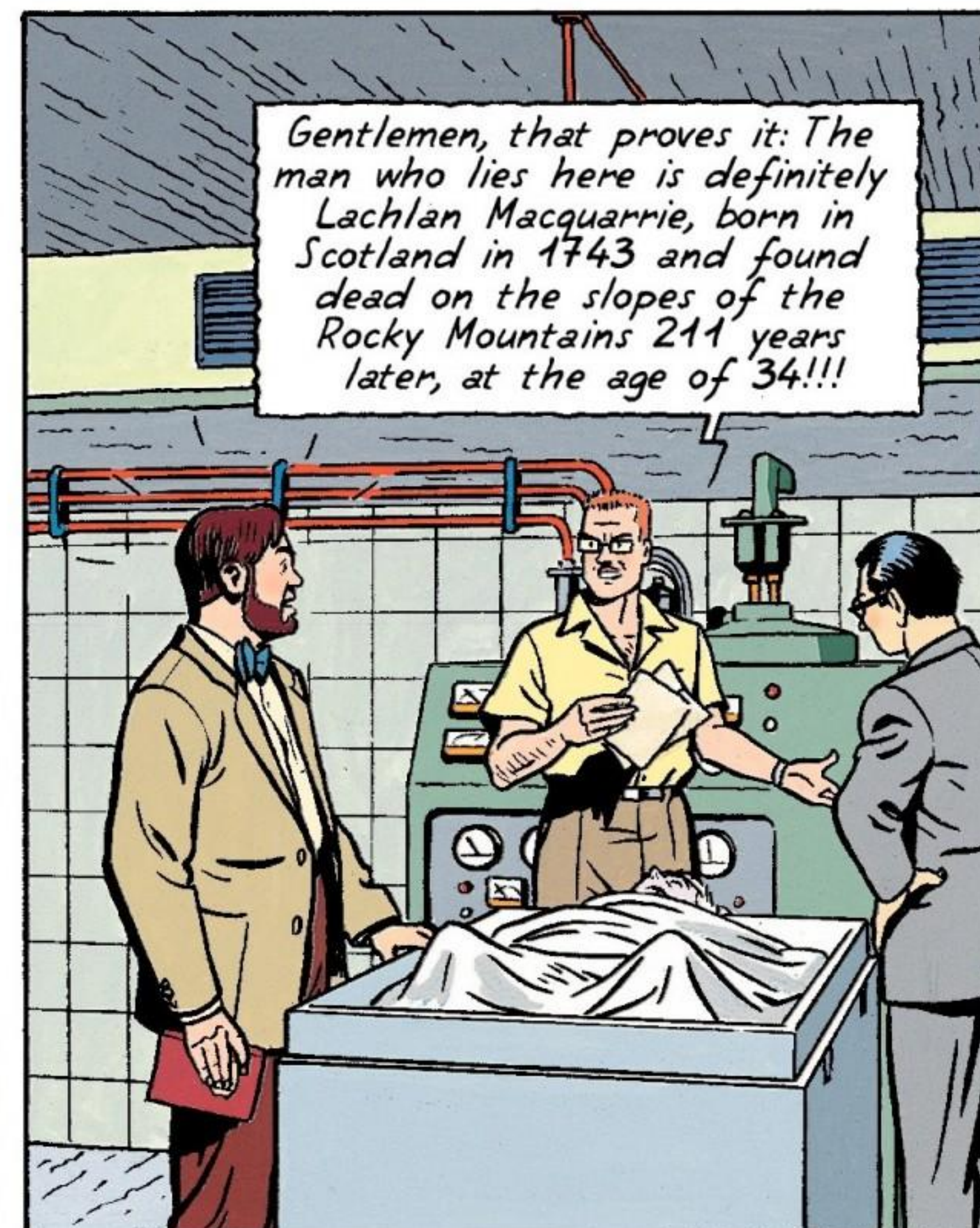
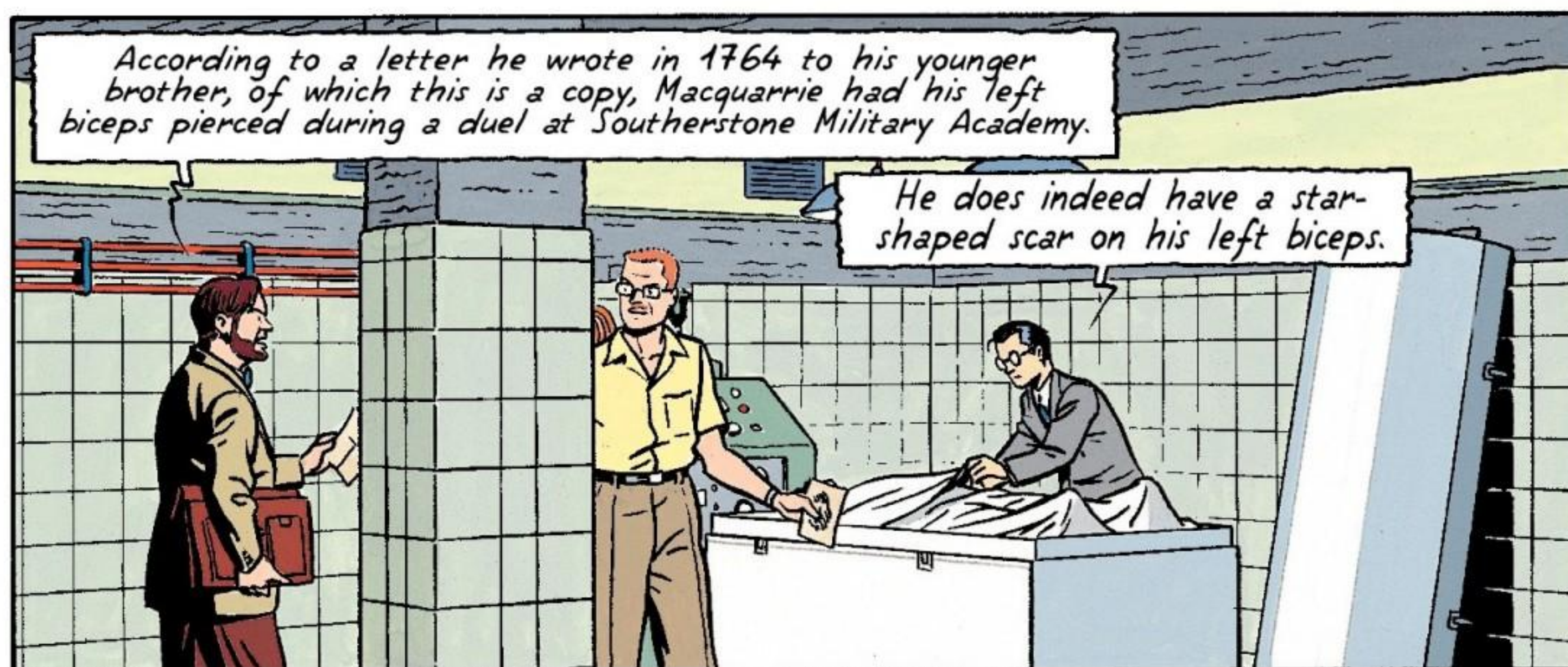
SOON THE TWO VEHICLES ARE OUT OF THE IMMENSE METROPOLIS.

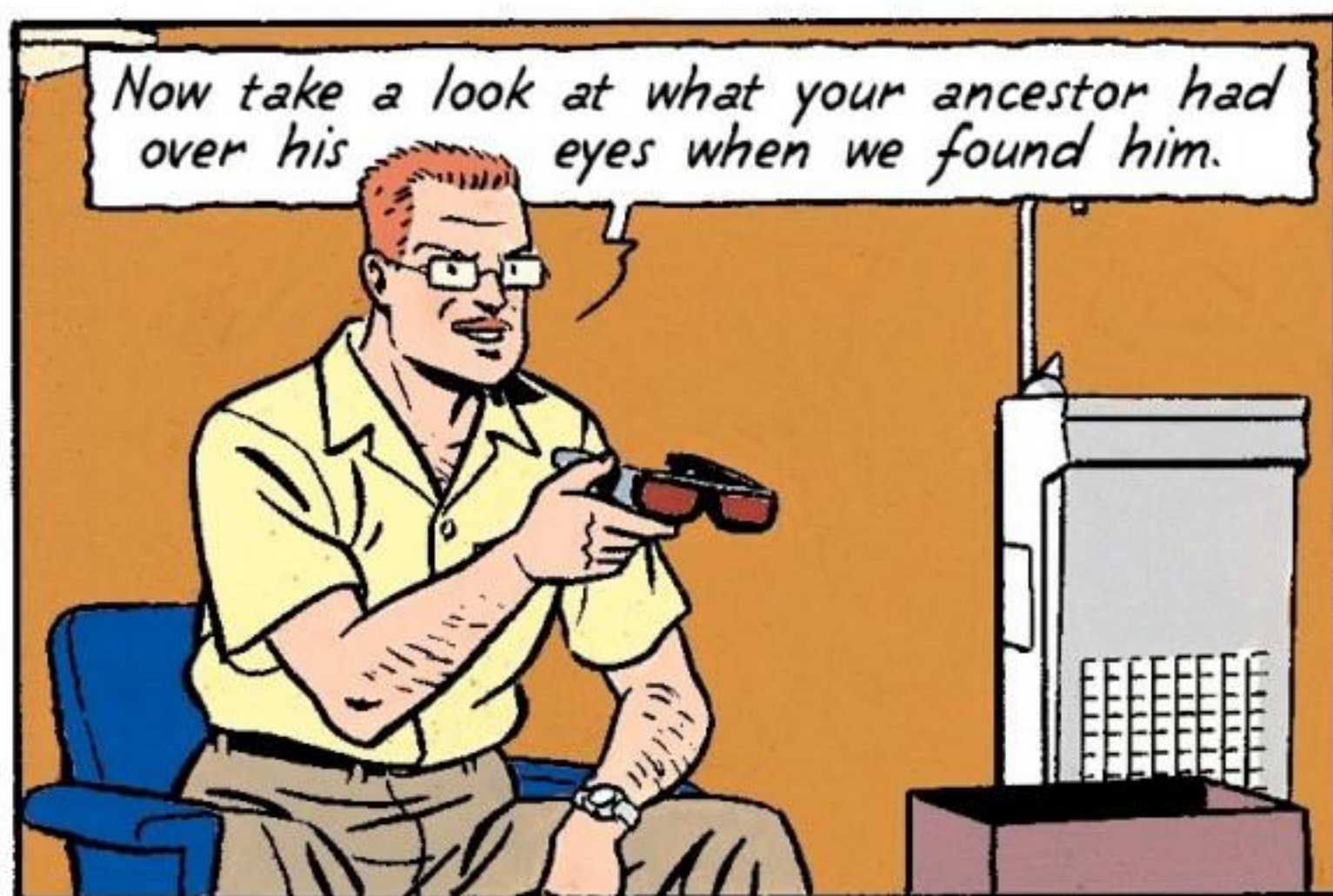










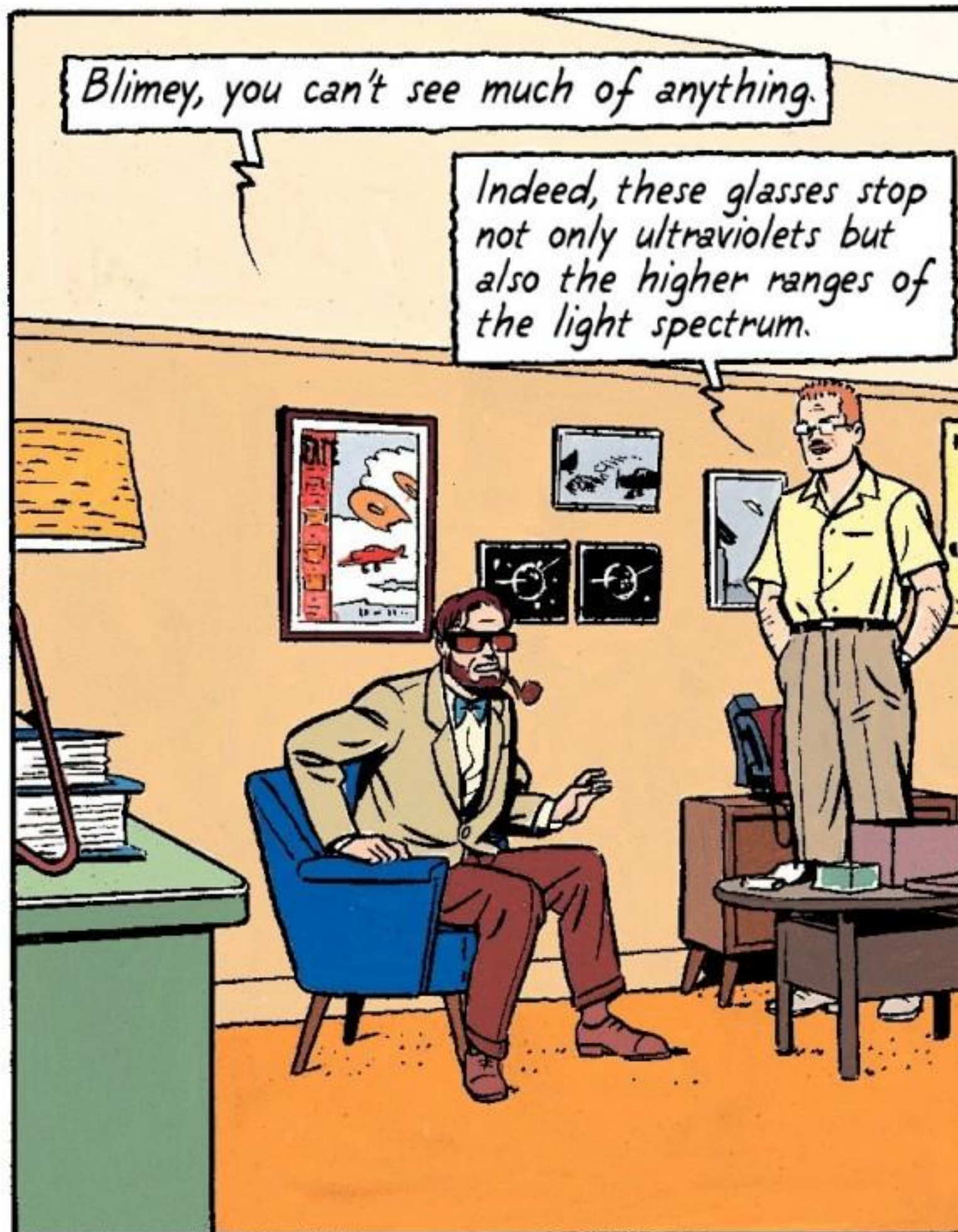


Now take a look at what your ancestor had over his eyes when we found him.



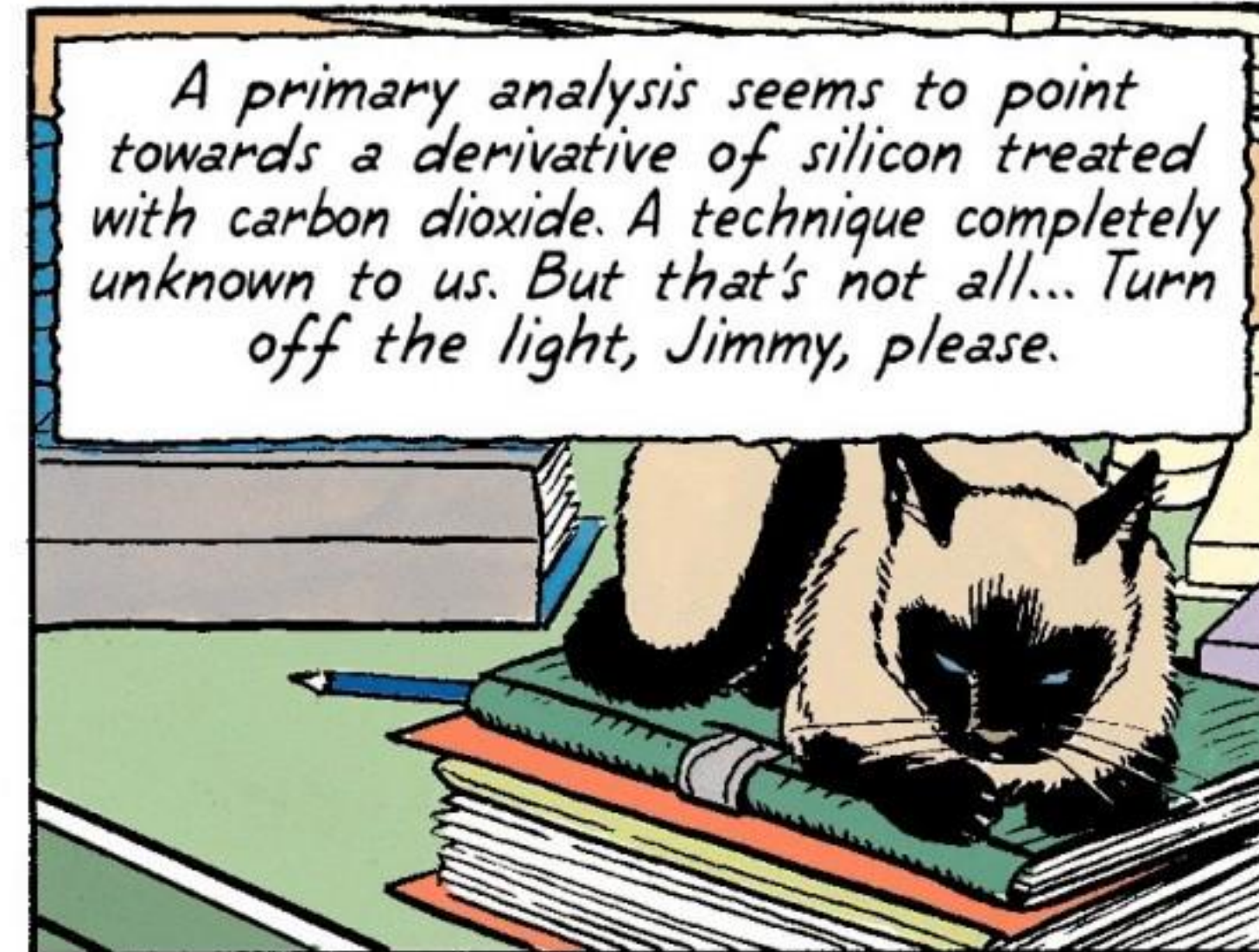
Sunglasses?!?

Of a sort. Try them on...



Blimey, you can't see much of anything.

Indeed, these glasses stop not only ultraviolets but also the higher ranges of the light spectrum.



A primary analysis seems to point towards a derivative of silicon treated with carbon dioxide. A technique completely unknown to us. But that's not all... Turn off the light, Jimmy, please.

OBEDIENTLY, DR KAUFMAN'S ASSISTANT PLUNGES THE ROOM INTO DARKNESS...



... AND MORTIMER, ASTOUNDED, DISCOVERS THAT HE CAN SEE ALMOST AS WELL AS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.



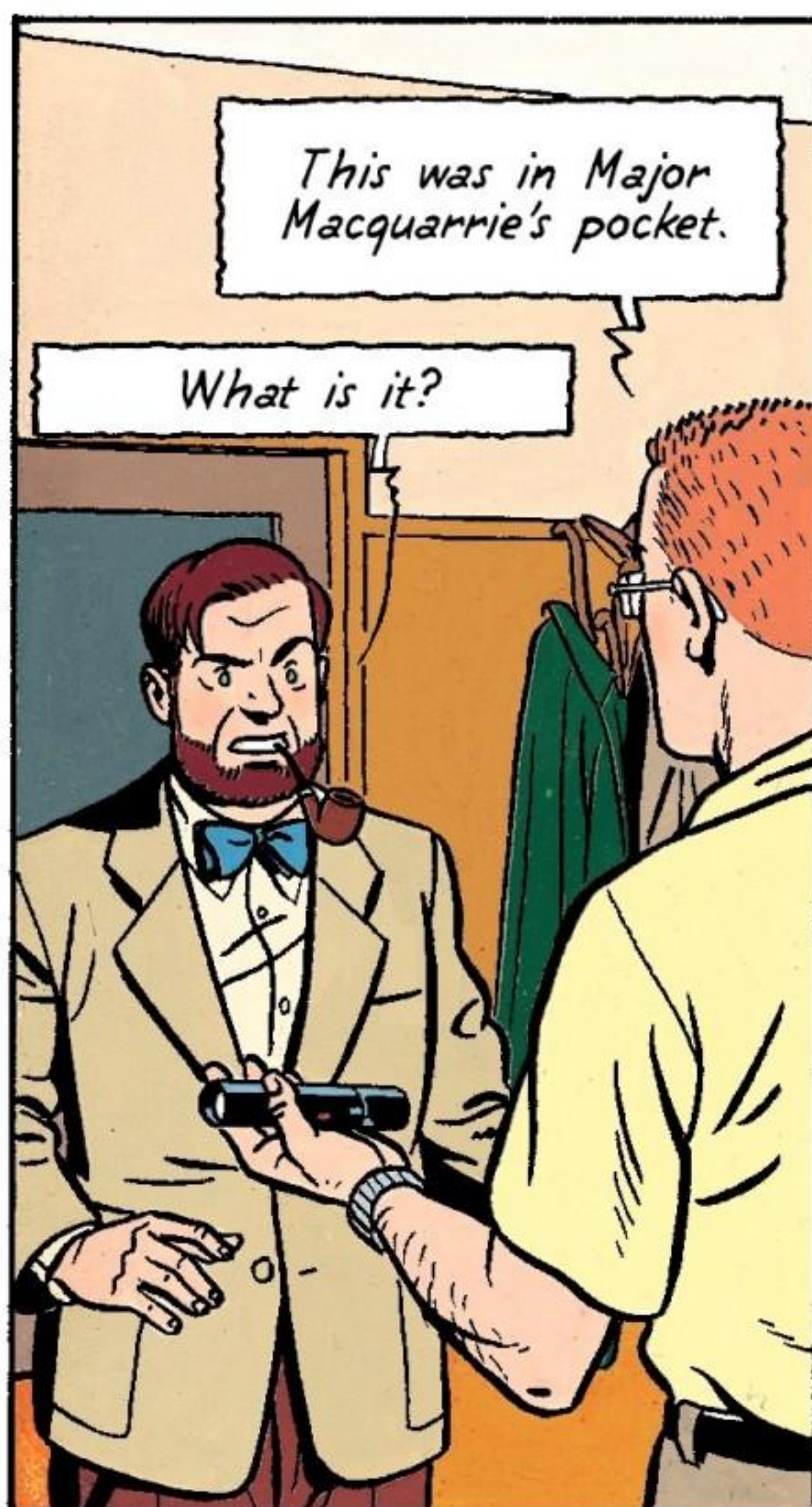
This is incredible!!

Isn't it? This material seems to have the ability to absorb the slightest trace of light from the lower end of the spectrum, and then radiate it back while amplifying it.



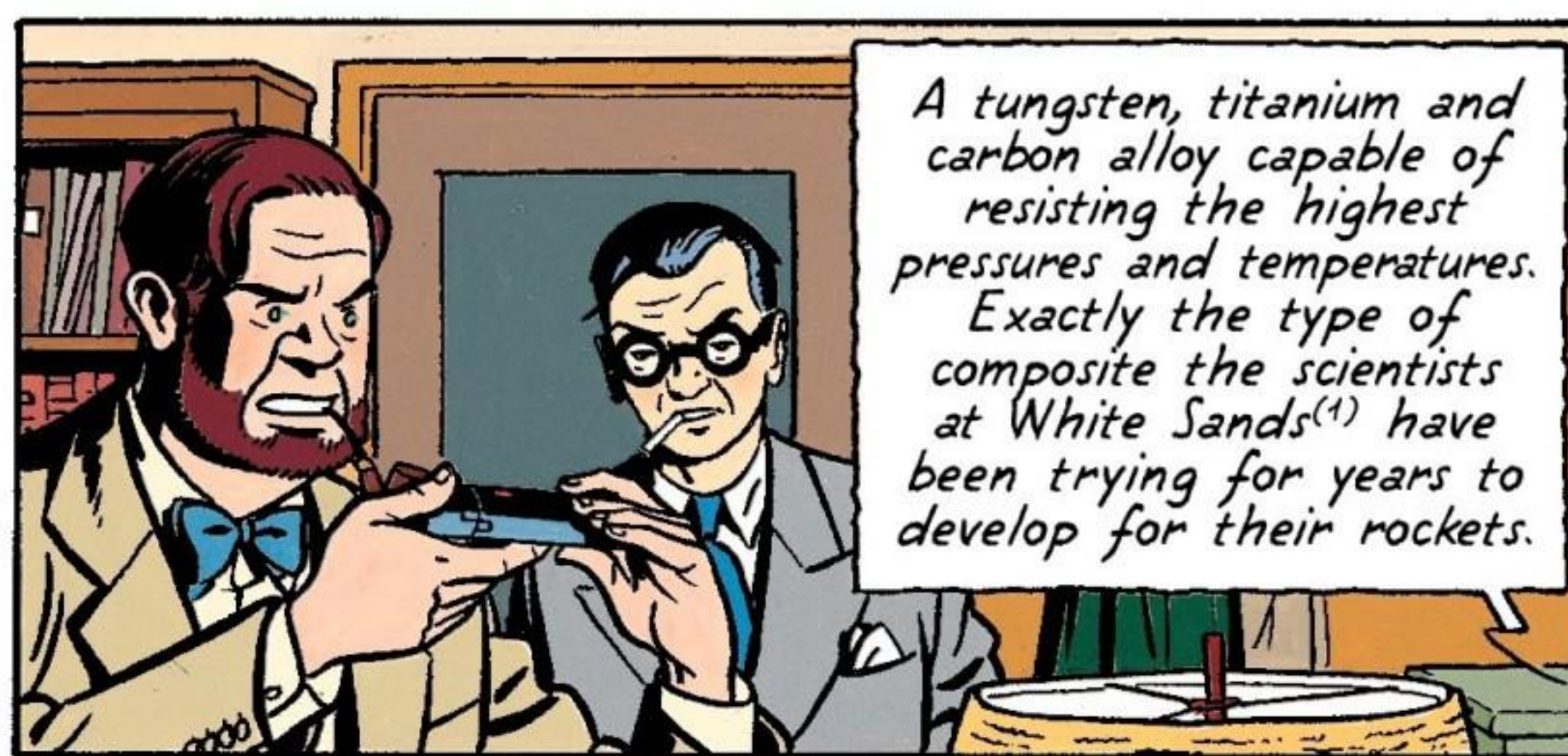
Unbelievable! Who on Earth could possibly have mastery of such technology?

That, my dear Philip, is the \$60,000 question. But I've kept the best for last...

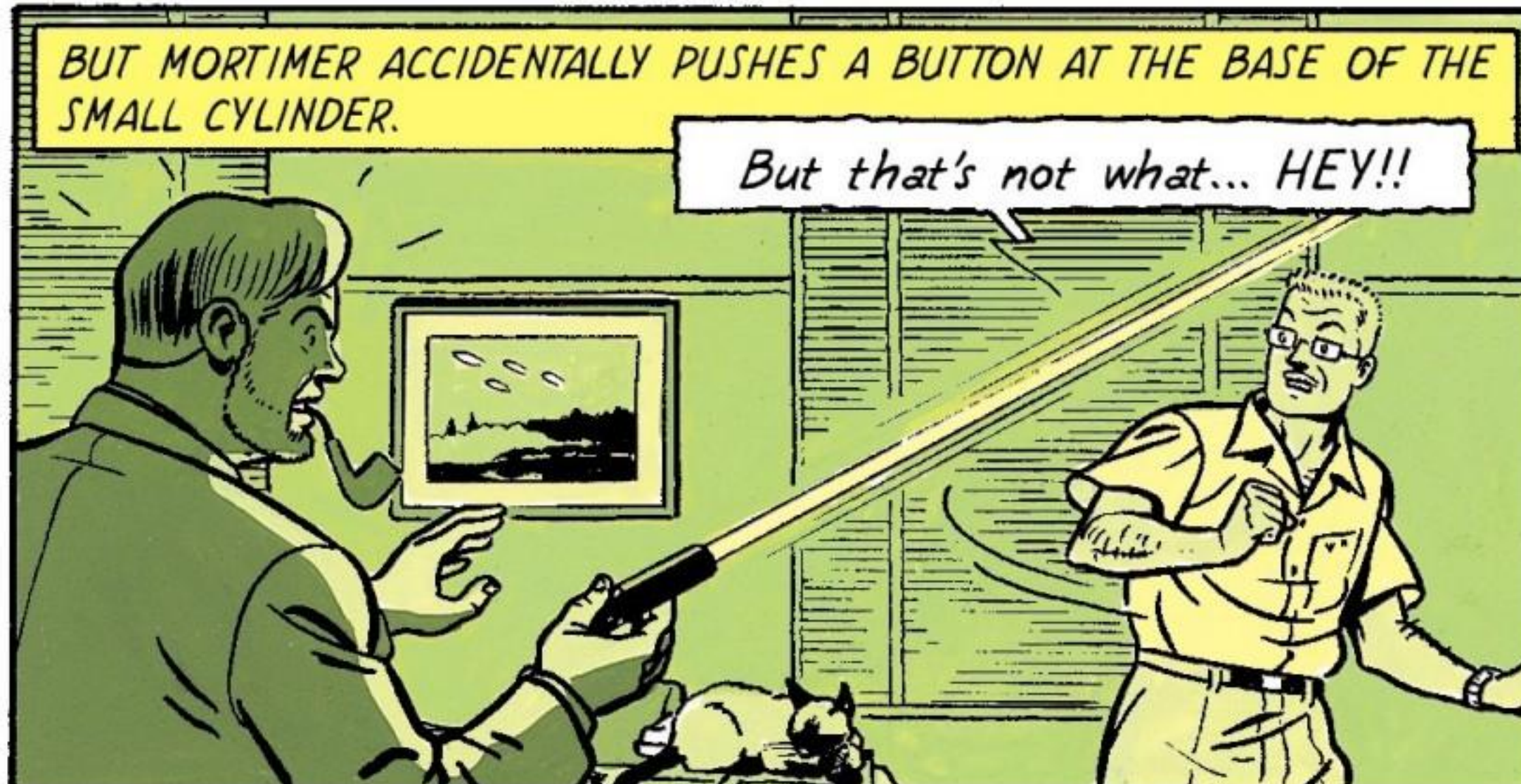


This was in Major Macquarrie's pocket.

What is it?



A tungsten, titanium and carbon alloy capable of resisting the highest pressures and temperatures. Exactly the type of composite the scientists at White Sands⁽¹⁾ have been trying for years to develop for their rockets.



BUT MORTIMER ACCIDENTALLY PUSHES A BUTTON AT THE BASE OF THE SMALL CYLINDER.

But that's not what... HEY!!

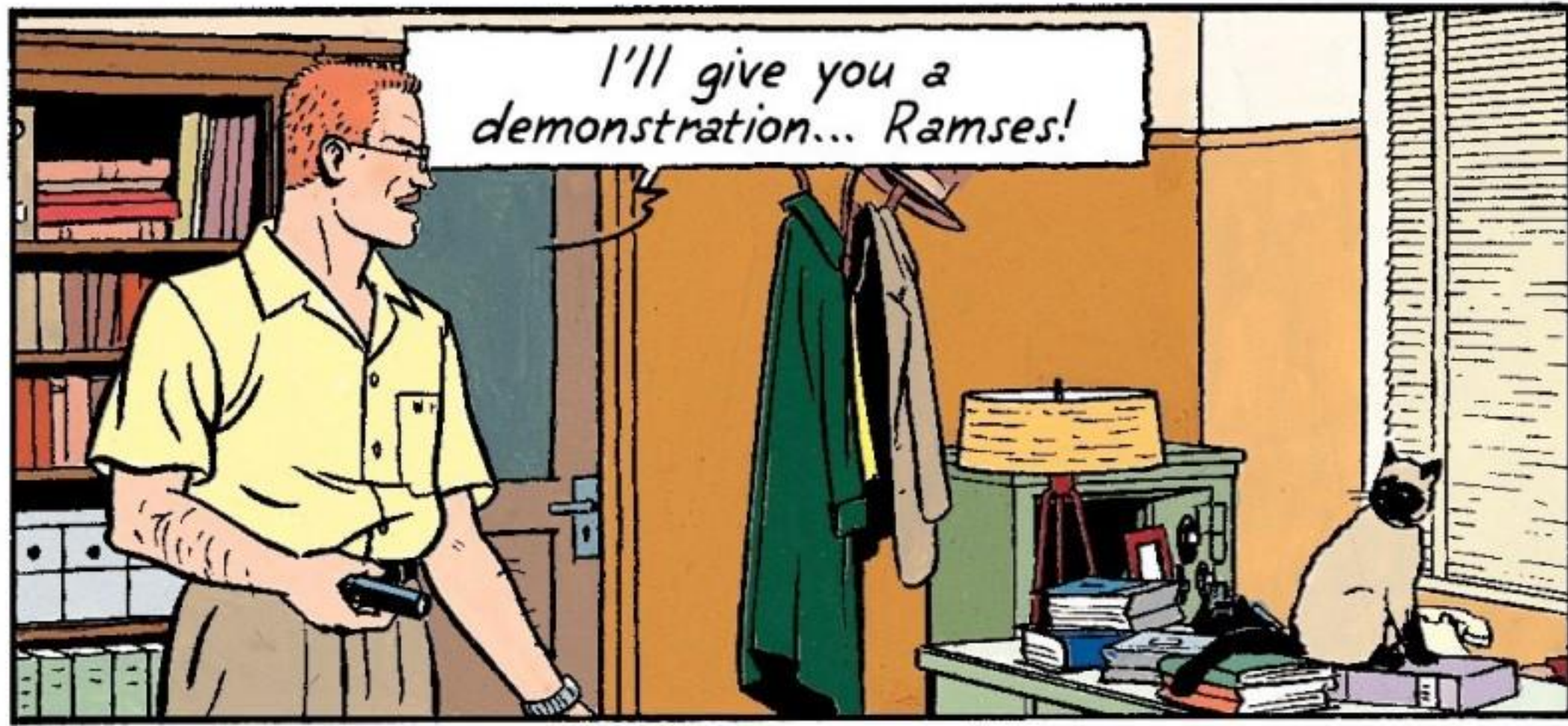


CONTRITE, OUR FRIEND HANDS THE STRANGE LITTLE CYLINDER BACK TO THE DIRECTOR OF SUFOS.

I... I am sorry. Is this beam dangerous?

Let's say it's an ideal remedy for insomnia.

⁽¹⁾ Main rocket testing base in the USA



I'll give you a demonstration... Ramses!

HEARING HIS NAME, DR KAUFMAN'S CAT STANDS UP.



STRUCK SQUARELY BY THE MYSTERIOUS BEAM, THE ANIMAL DOESN'T EVEN FLINCH.



You'll notice that nothing happened. Ramses didn't feel a thing. Now I'm going to aim for the head...

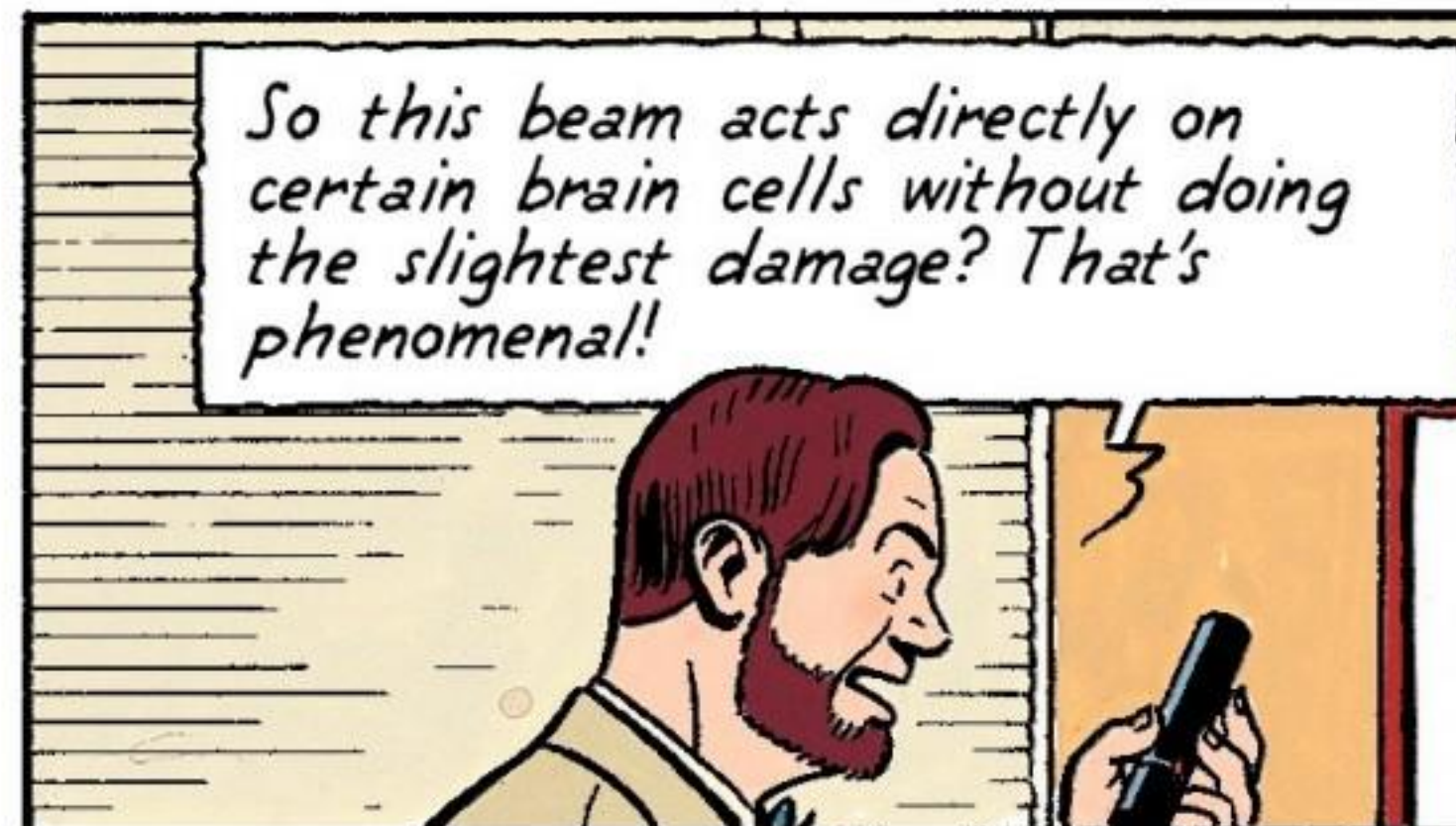


AND THIS TIME THE CAT COLLAPSES AS IF STRUCK BY LIGHTNING.



My goodness, the poor creature!

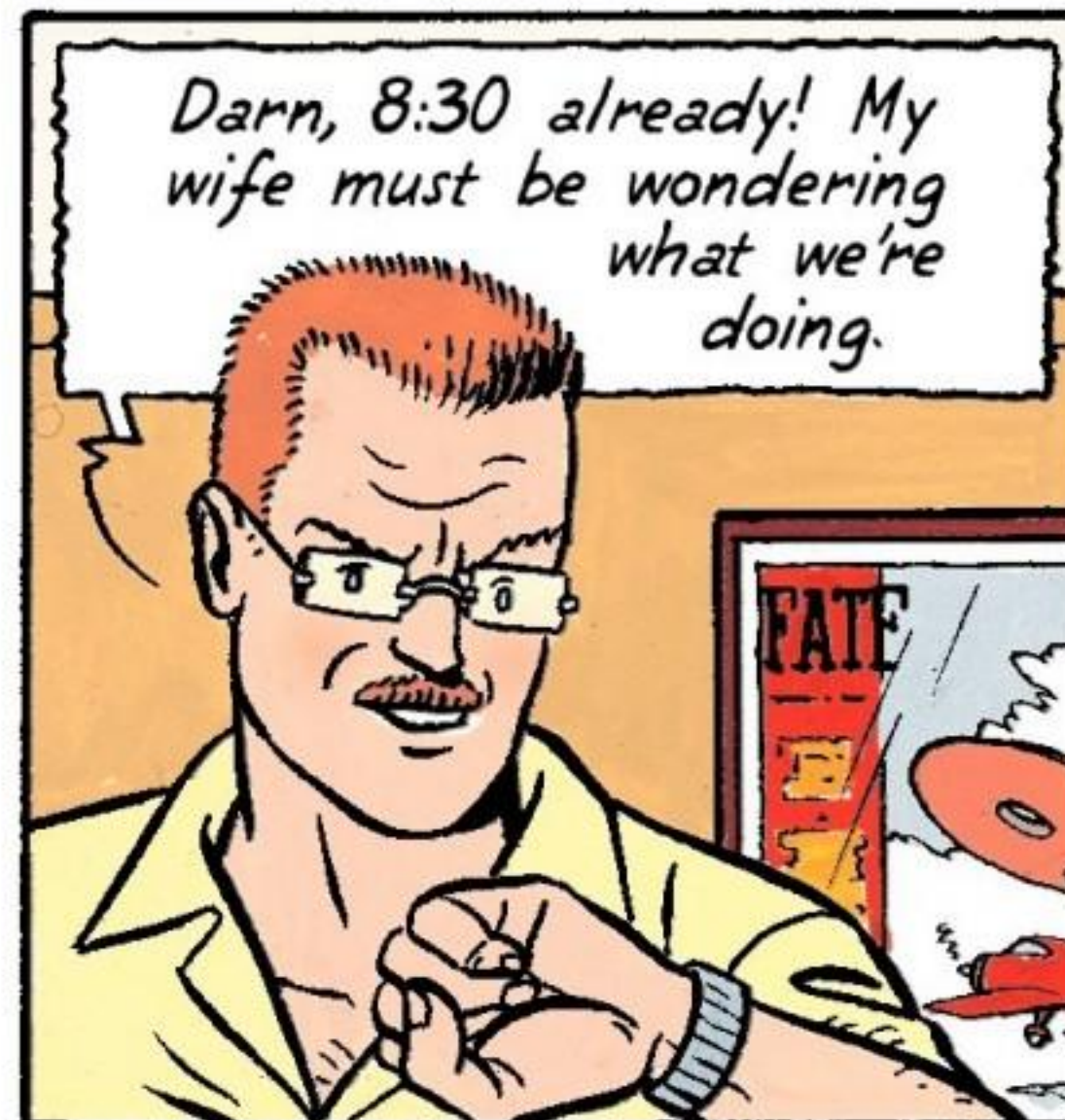
Don't worry, Philip. Ramses will wake up in an hour or two without the slightest headache. He won't even remember what happened to him.



So this beam acts directly on certain brain cells without doing the slightest damage? That's phenomenal!



My opinion exactly. What we have here is a "clean" weapon, so to speak.

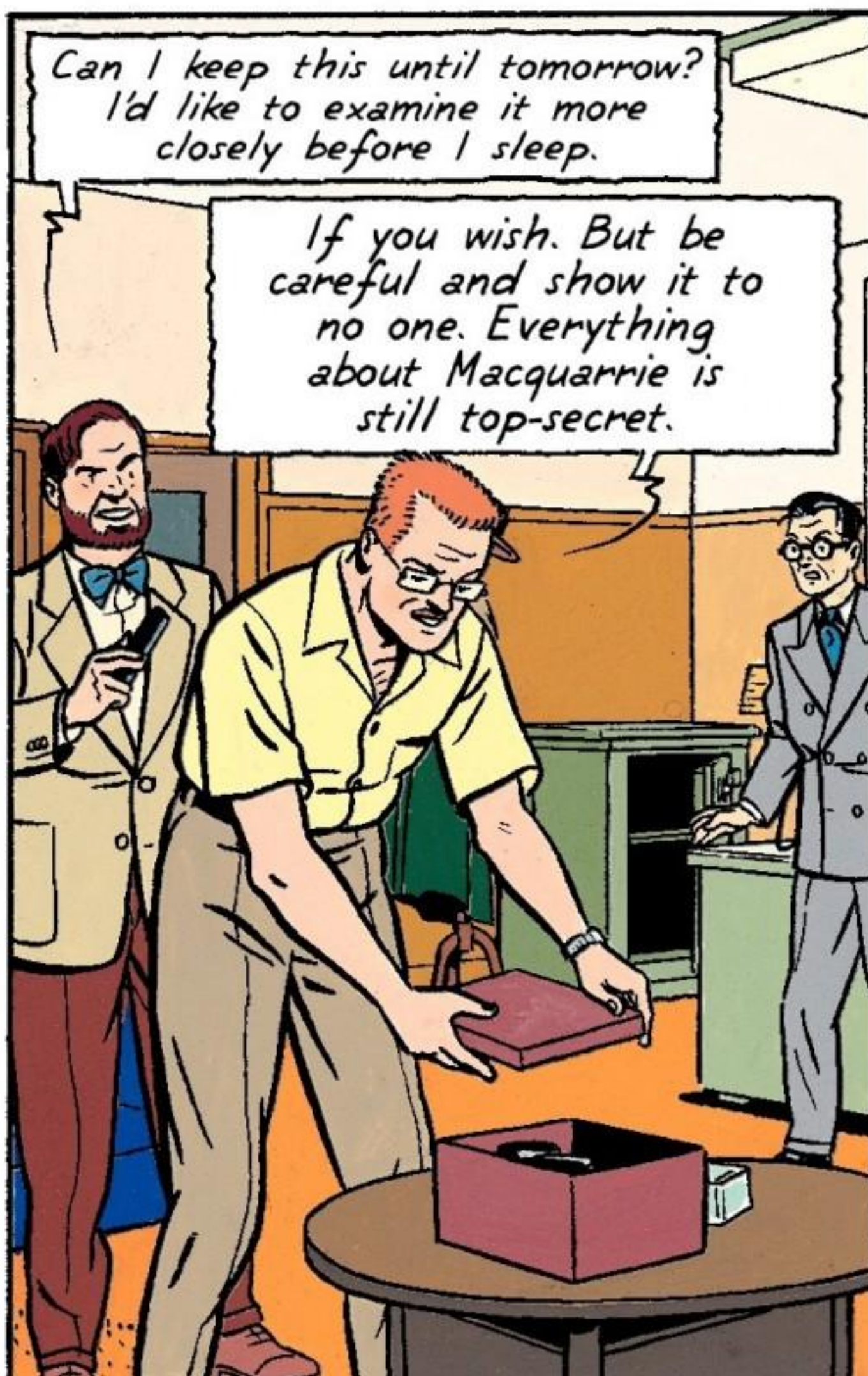


Darn, 8:30 already! My wife must be wondering what we're doing.



Because of course you're coming for dinner at our house. I'll drop you off at your hotel afterwards.

With the utmost pleasure. I have to tell you, my dear Walt, all these emotions have given me quite an appetite...



Can I keep this until tomorrow? I'd like to examine it more closely before I sleep.

If you wish. But be careful and show it to no one. Everything about Macquarrie is still top-secret.



I'll leave it to you to close up, Jimmy. And would you be kind enough to take the professor's luggage to the Windsor Hotel before going home?

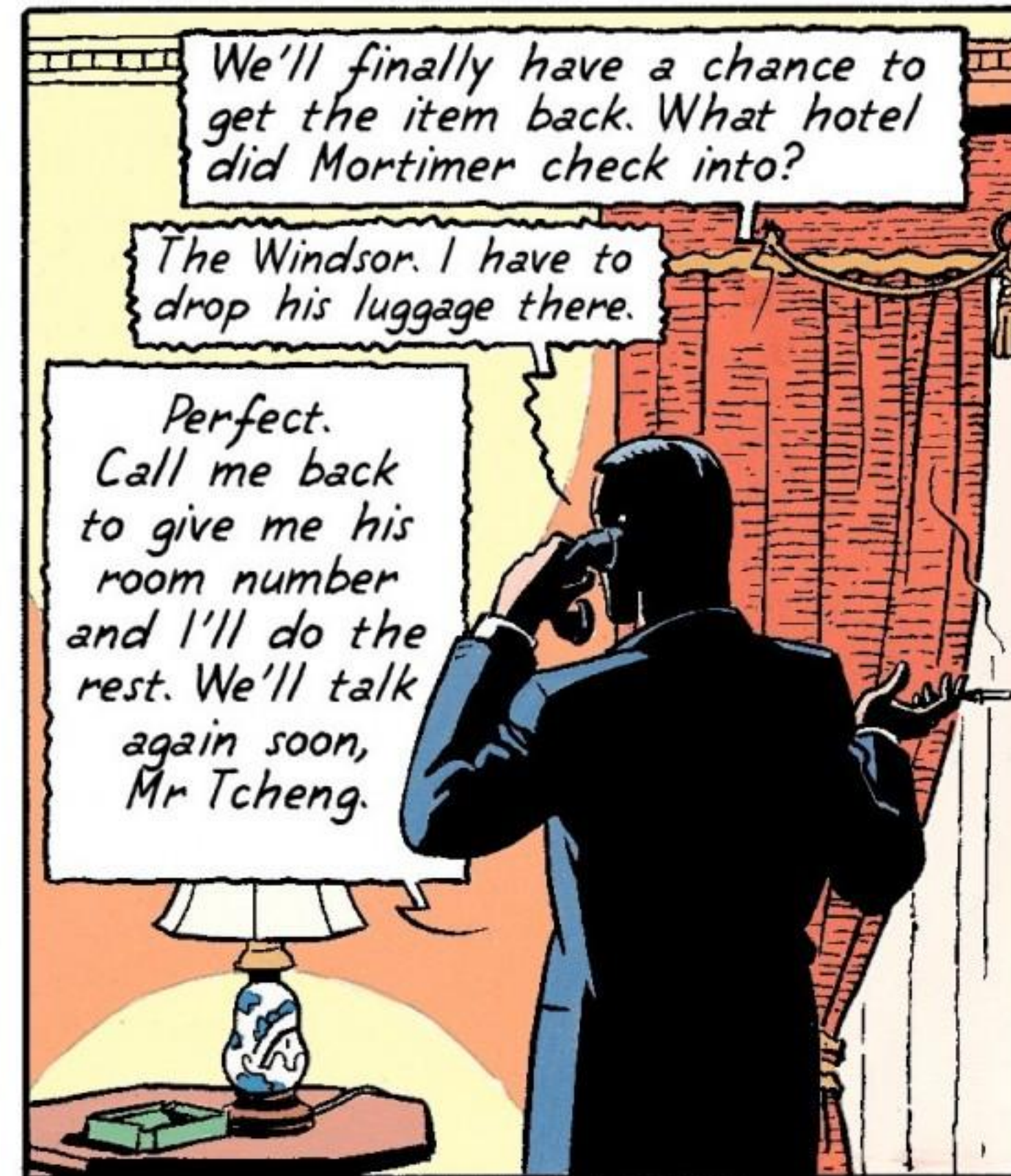
Of course, Professor, you can count on me.



A MINUTE LATER, DR KAUFMAN IS TAKING MORTIMER TOWARDS THE CSS PARKING LOT.

You'll see. Marjorie may not be the best cook in the world, but she makes a quite honourable grilled chicken with corn—a specialty from Kansas.

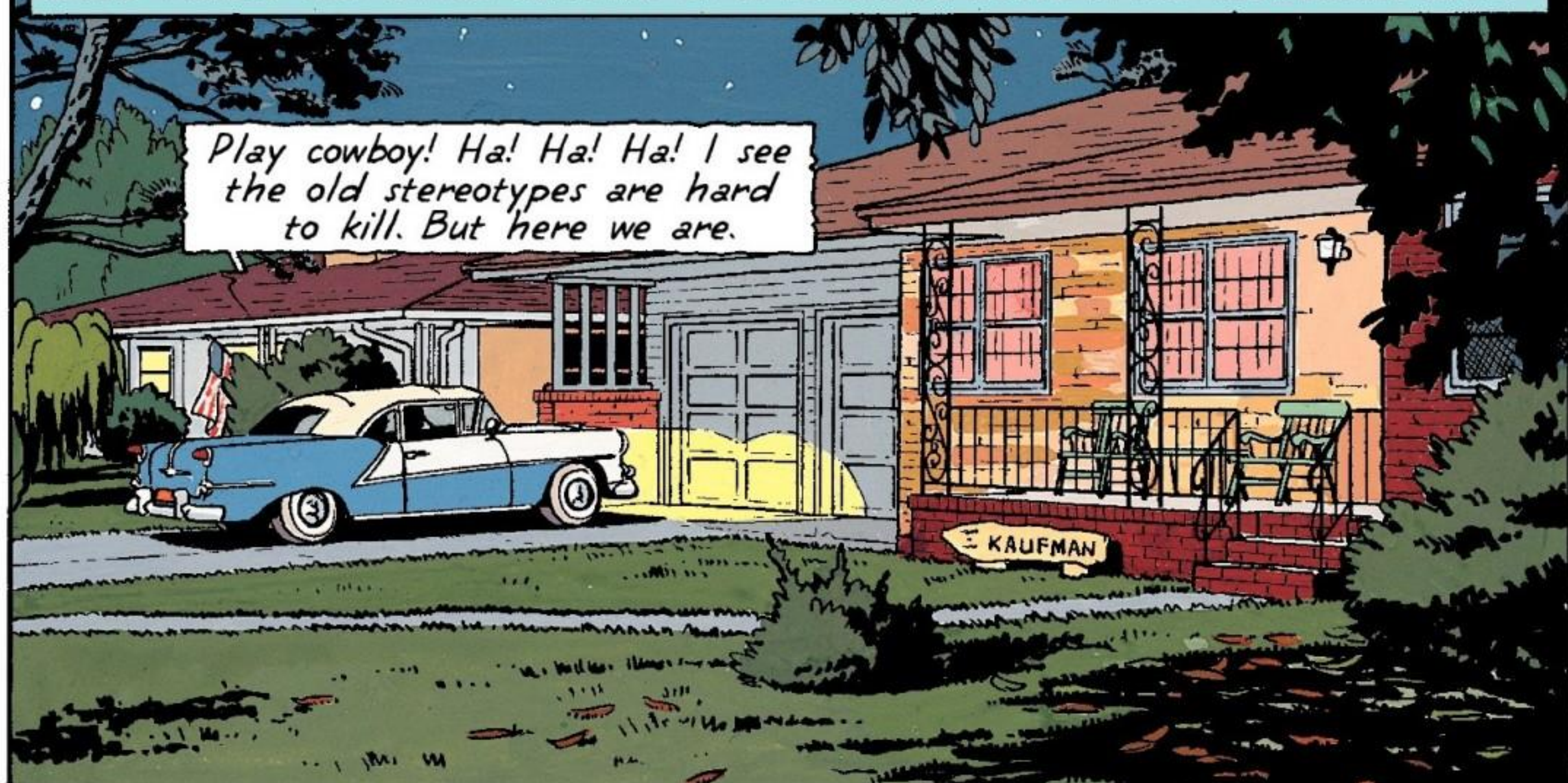
I'm looking forward to trying it, dear fellow.

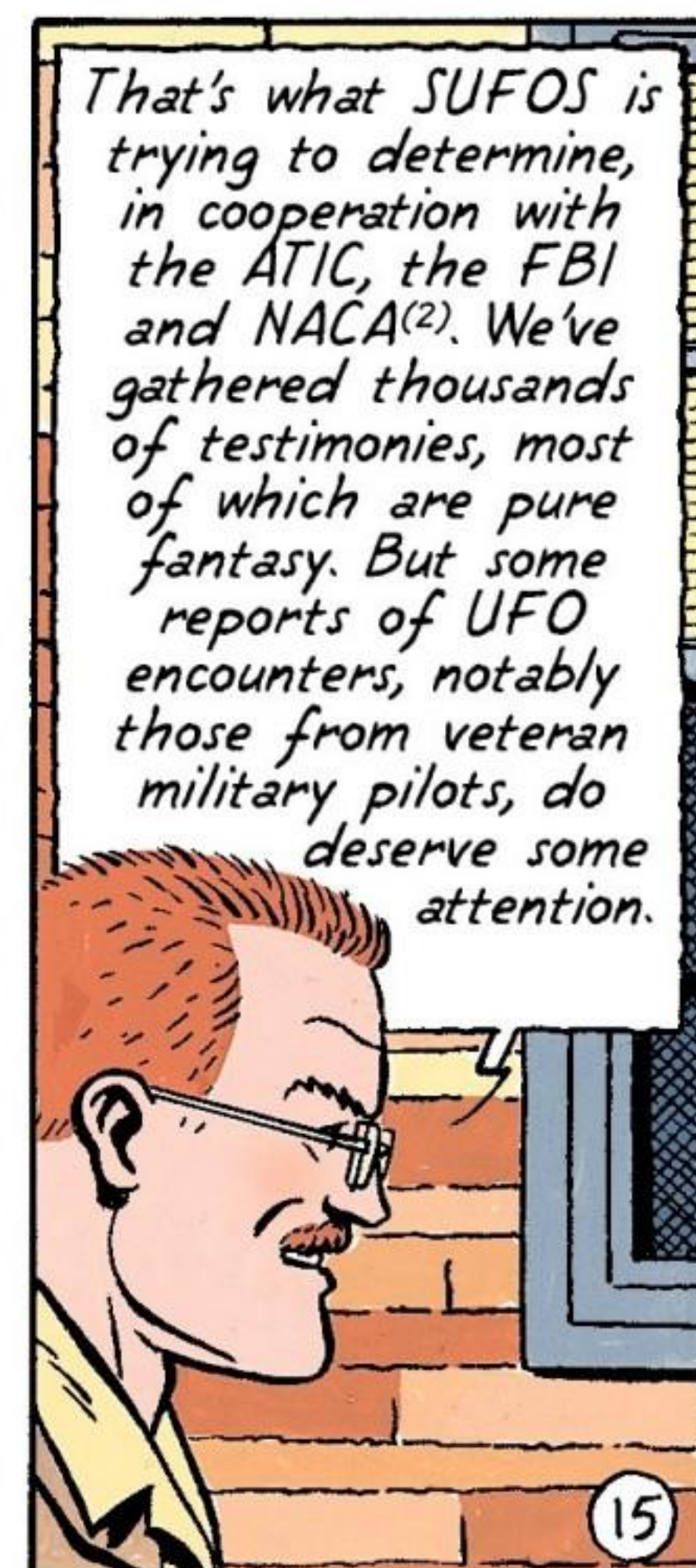
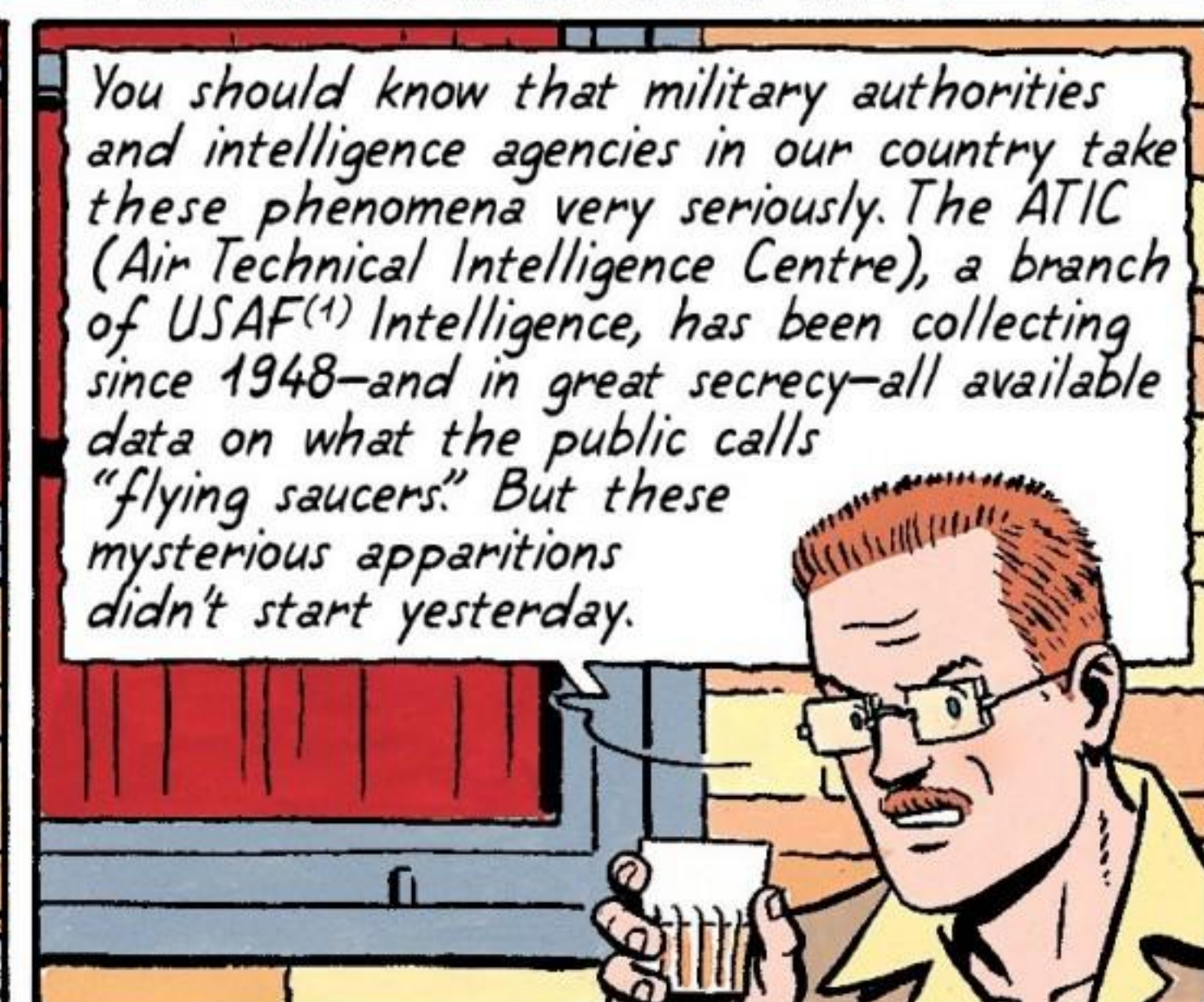
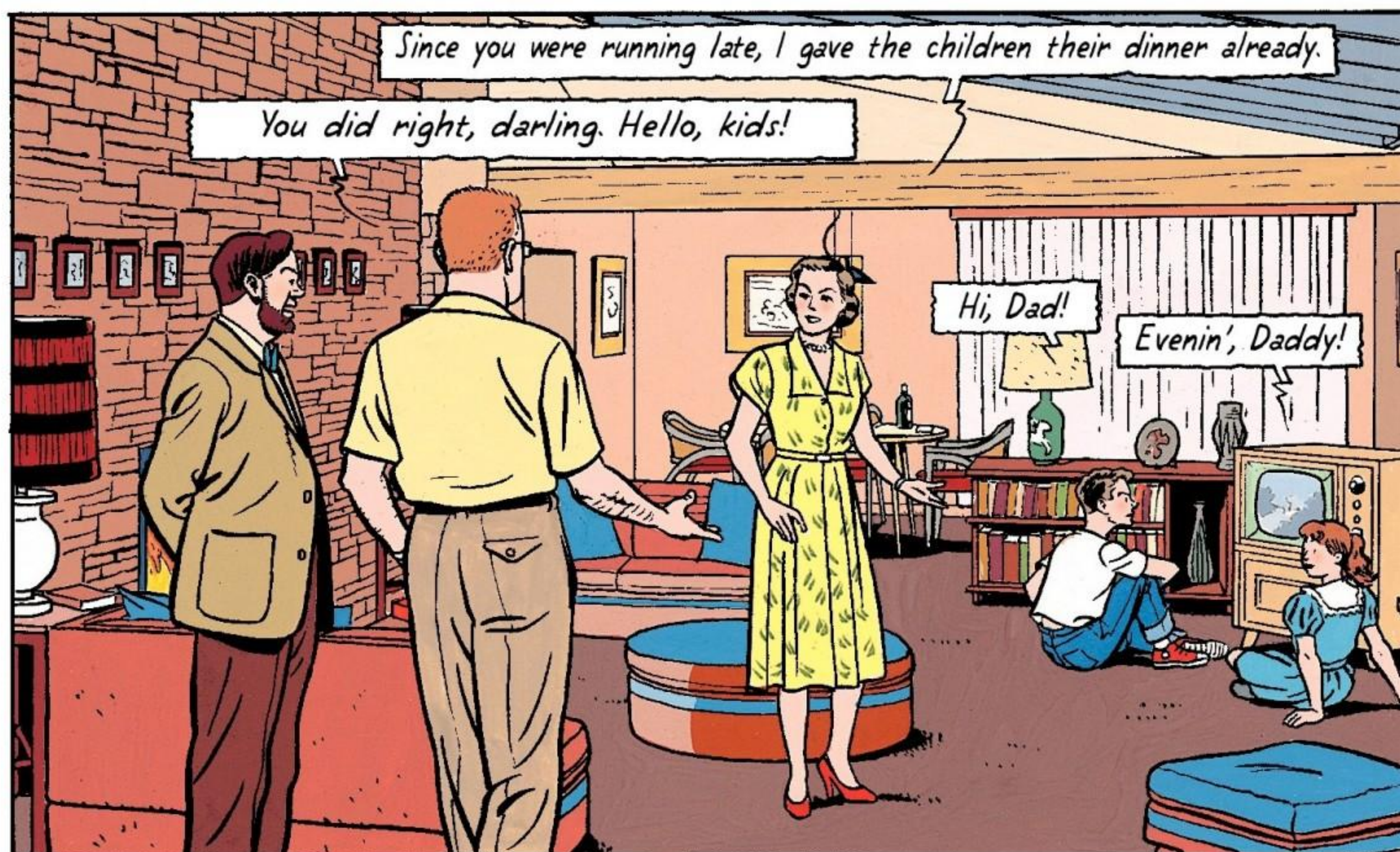


MEANWHILE, THE TWO SCIENTISTS REACH GARDEN CITY, THE SMALL TOWN NEAR THE CSS...



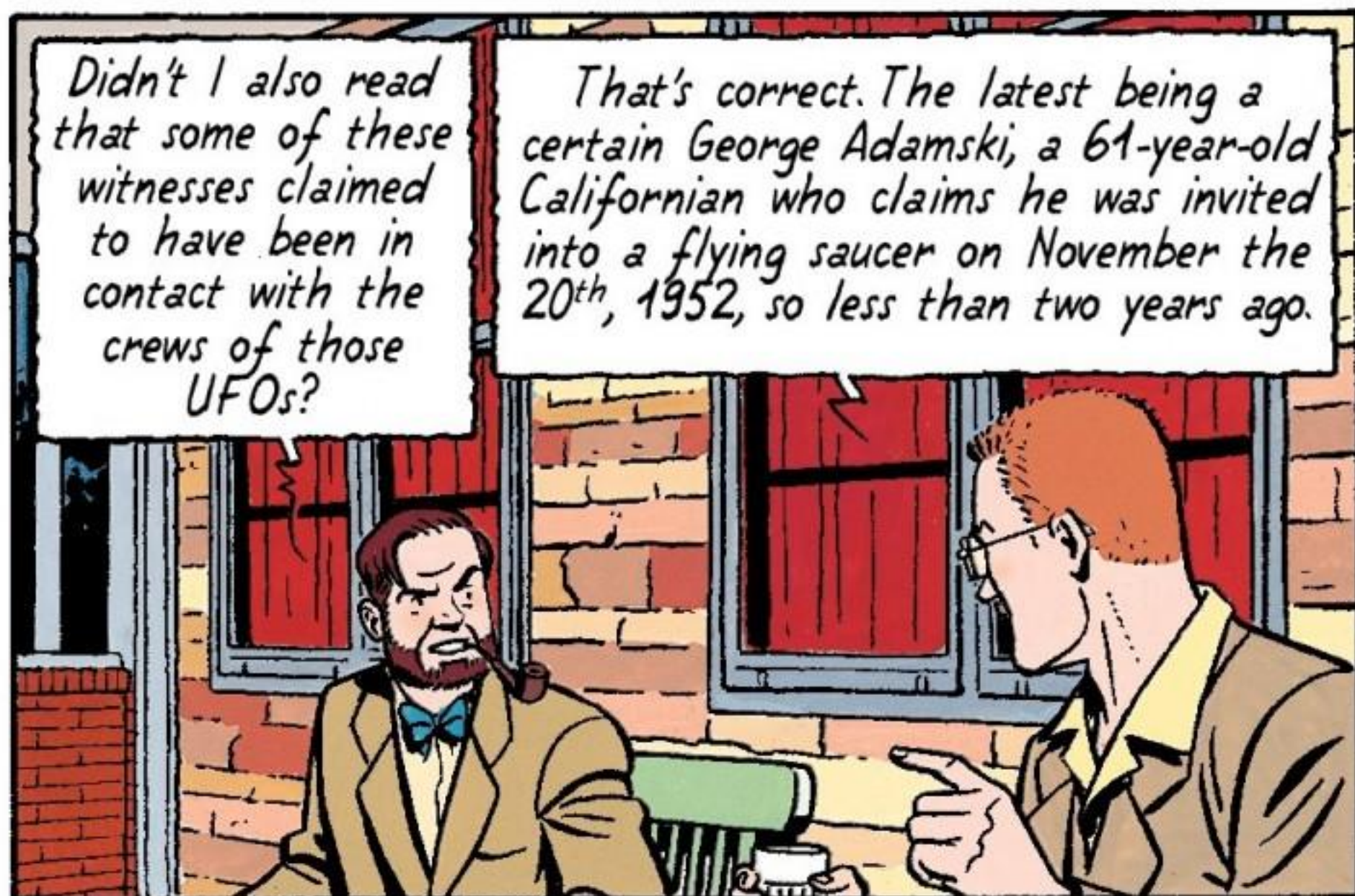
... AND FINALLY STOP IN THE DRIVEWAY OF A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE IN THE RESIDENTIAL AREA.





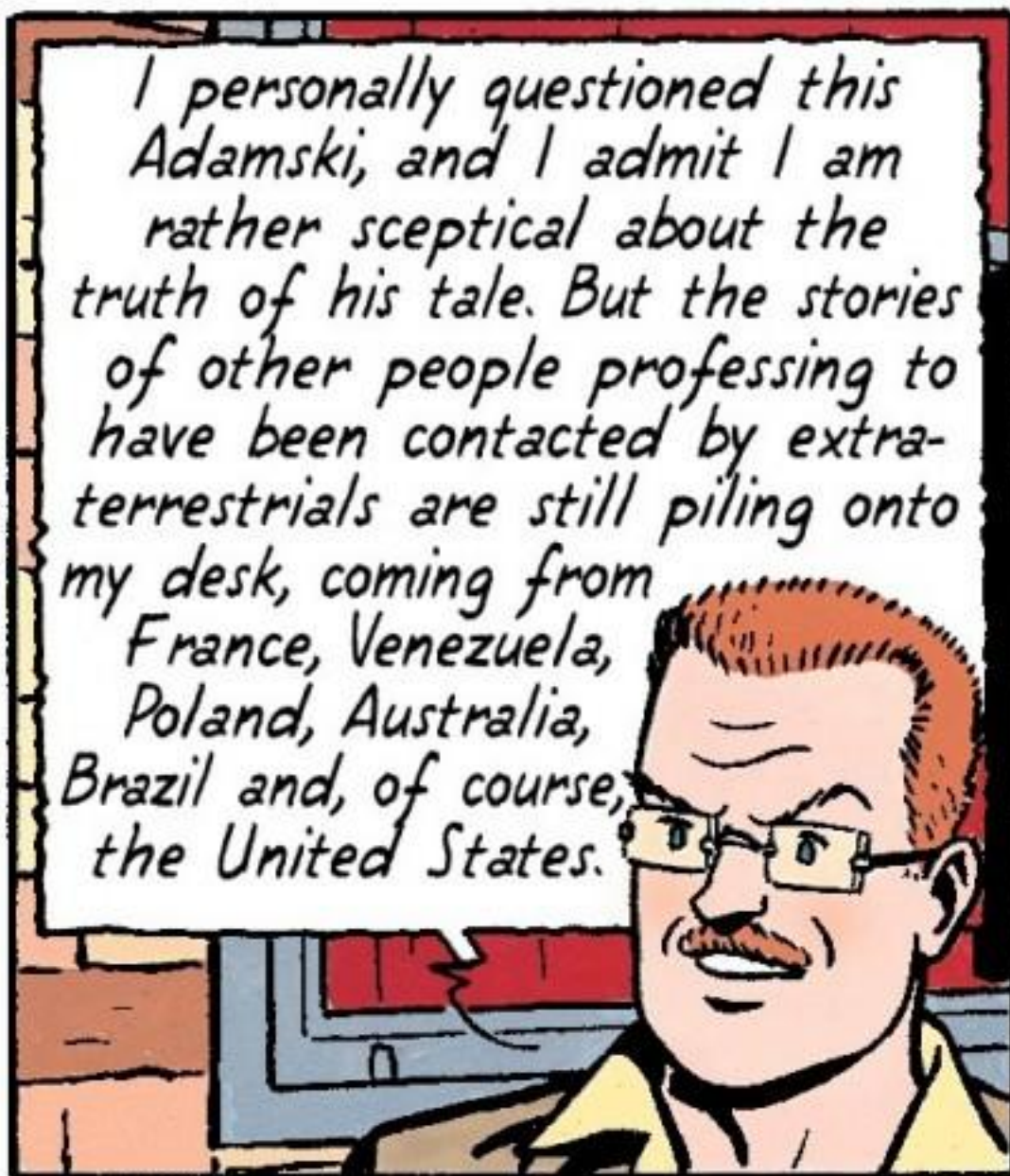
⁽¹⁾United States Air Force

⁽²⁾National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics—NASA's ancestor



Didn't I also read that some of these witnesses claimed to have been in contact with the crews of those UFOs?

That's correct. The latest being a certain George Adamski, a 61-year-old Californian who claims he was invited into a flying saucer on November the 20th, 1952, so less than two years ago.



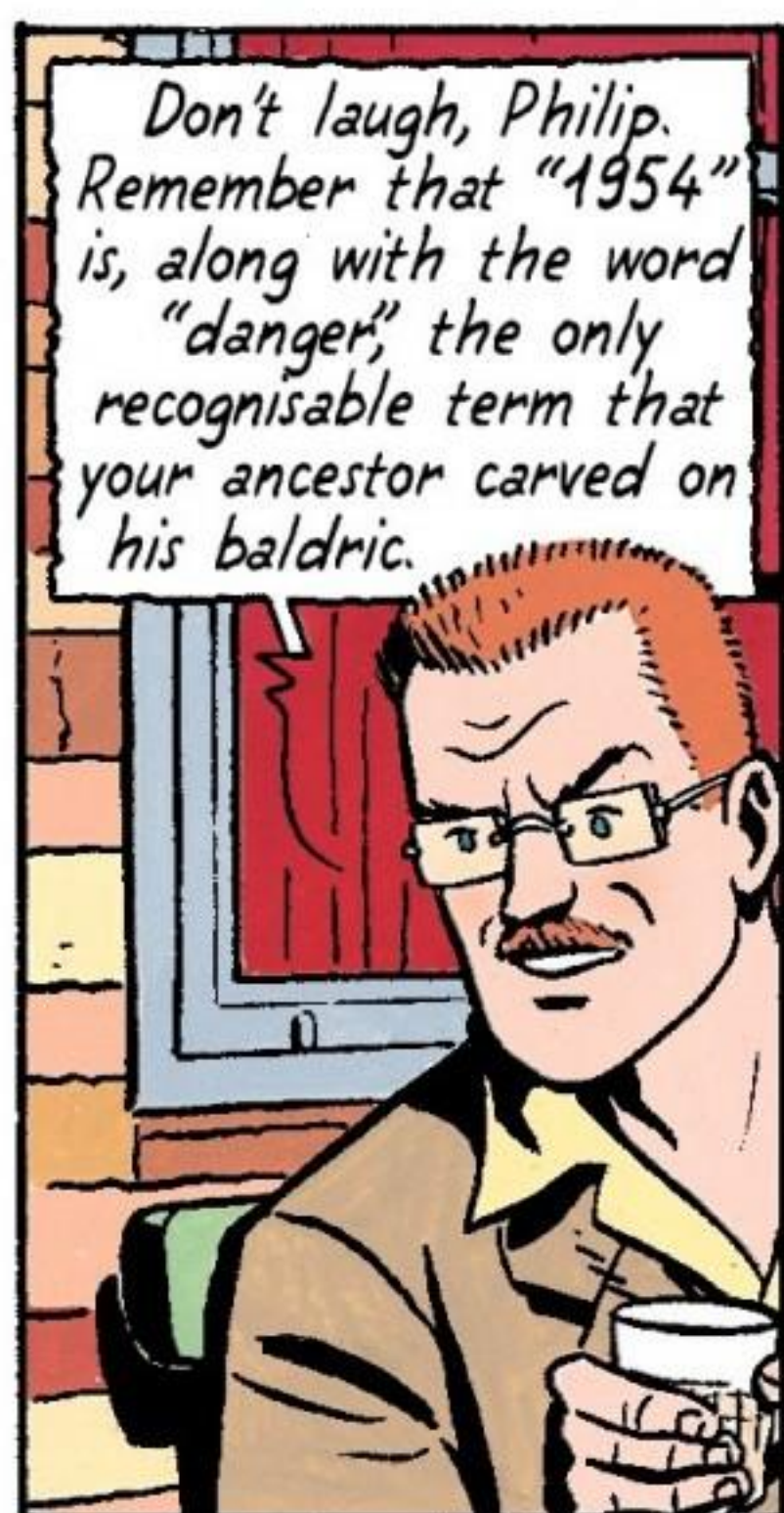
I personally questioned this Adamski, and I admit I am rather sceptical about the truth of his tale. But the stories of other people professing to have been contacted by extra-terrestrials are still piling onto my desk, coming from France, Venezuela, Poland, Australia, Brazil and, of course, the United States.



It would seem, in fact, that this very year, 1954, is particularly rich in "encounters" of this kind.



As if our visitors from outer space were getting ready to invade Earth? This is science fiction, my dear Walt.



Don't laugh, Philip. Remember that "1954" is, along with the word "danger", the only recognisable term that your ancestor carved on his baldric.



And you believe that Major Macquarrie, kidnapped 177 years ago by alien beings, escaped them and made his way back this year to bring warning of a threat to us all?

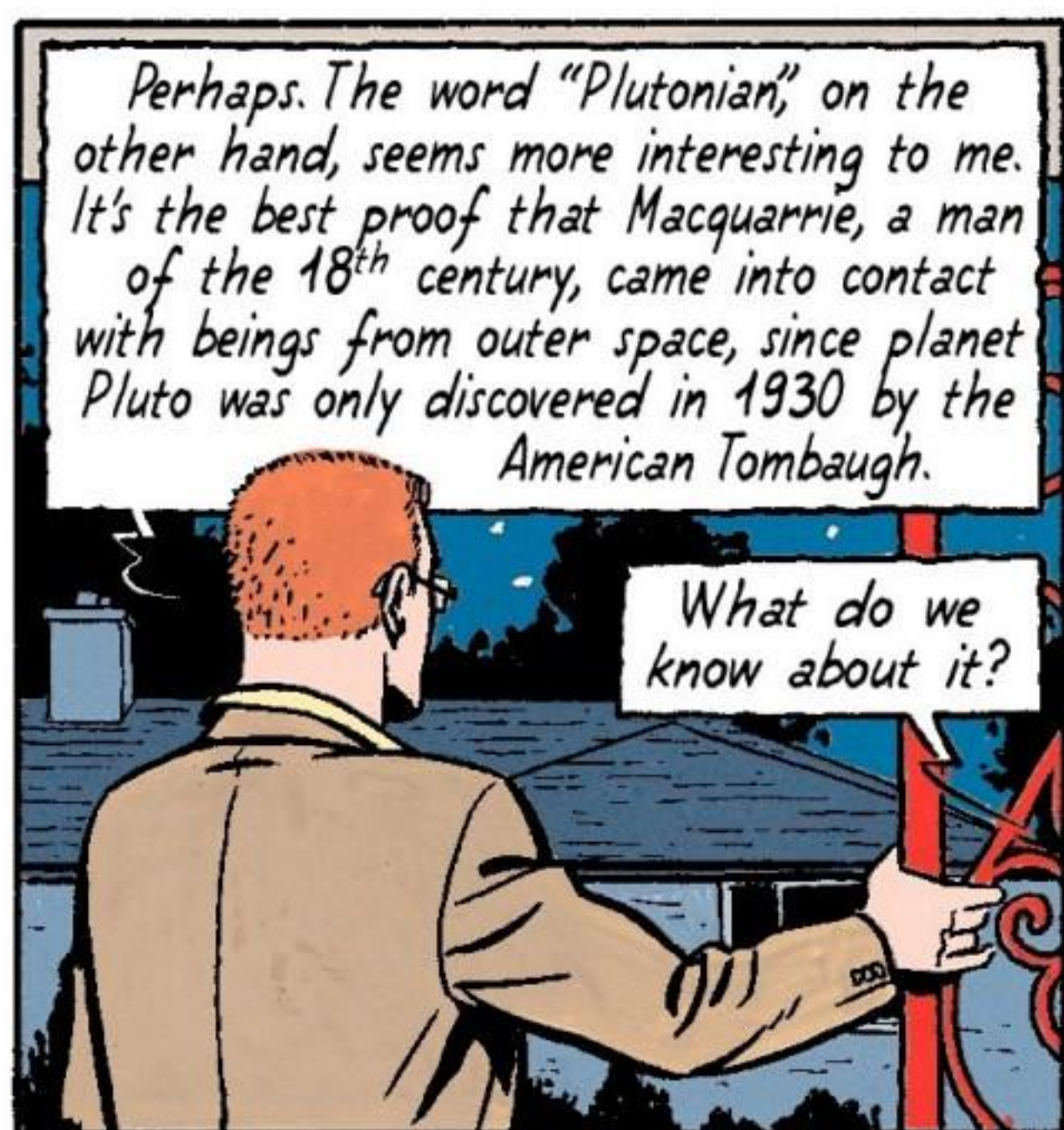


In fact, I don't see any other explanation. The question is: What manner of threat is it? And above all: WHO is threatening us?



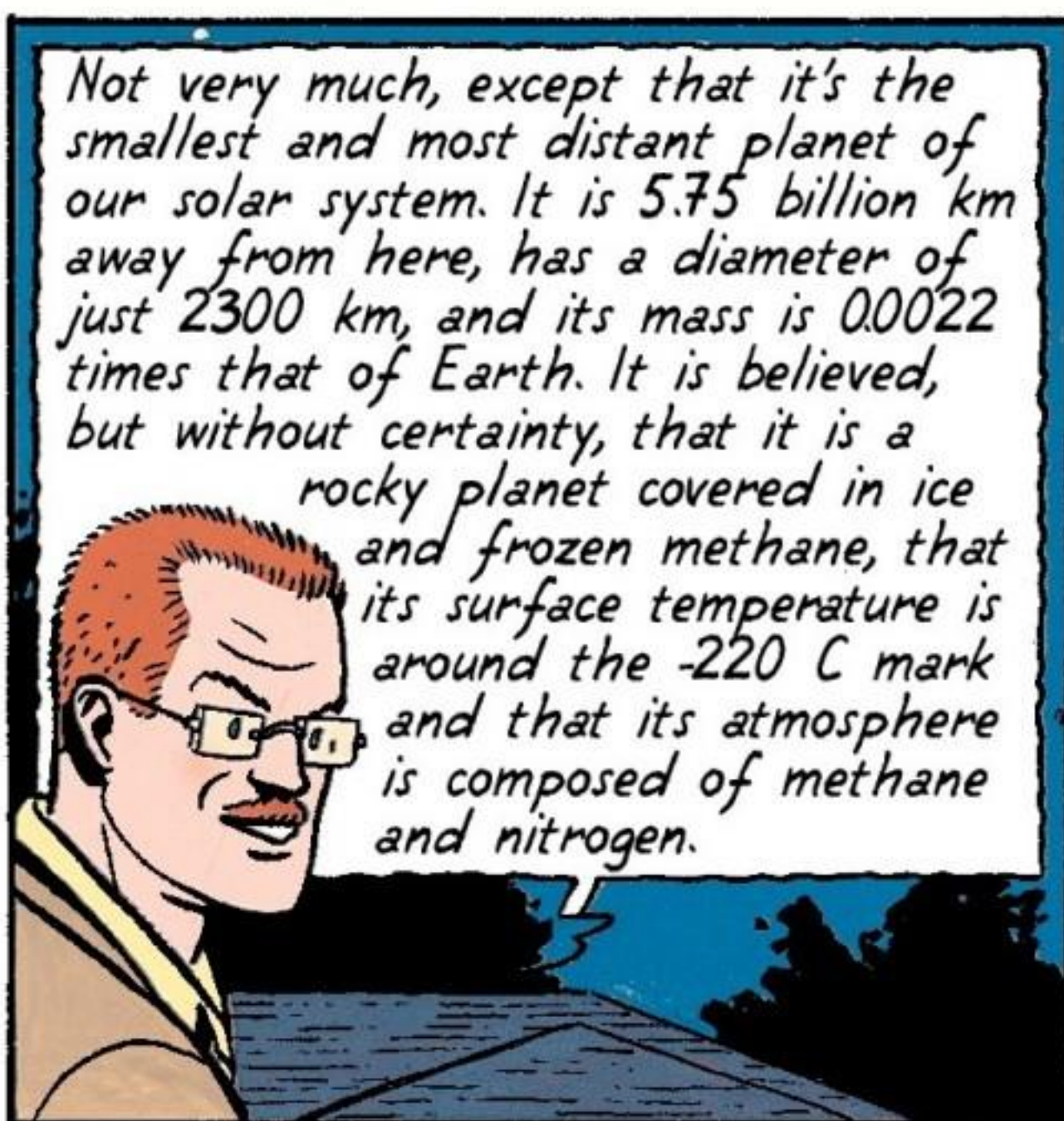
Let's try to figure out what your ancestor wanted to tell us. "Yellow King-8064-Danger-Light-Plutonian-H-Poplar trees-Temple 1954." It seems clear to me that "light" refers to the beams the good Colorado farmer saw.

Or maybe to the fact that our "visitors" must have discovered some means of travelling faster than light in order to reach us. Which, according to our current scientific knowledge, appears impossible.

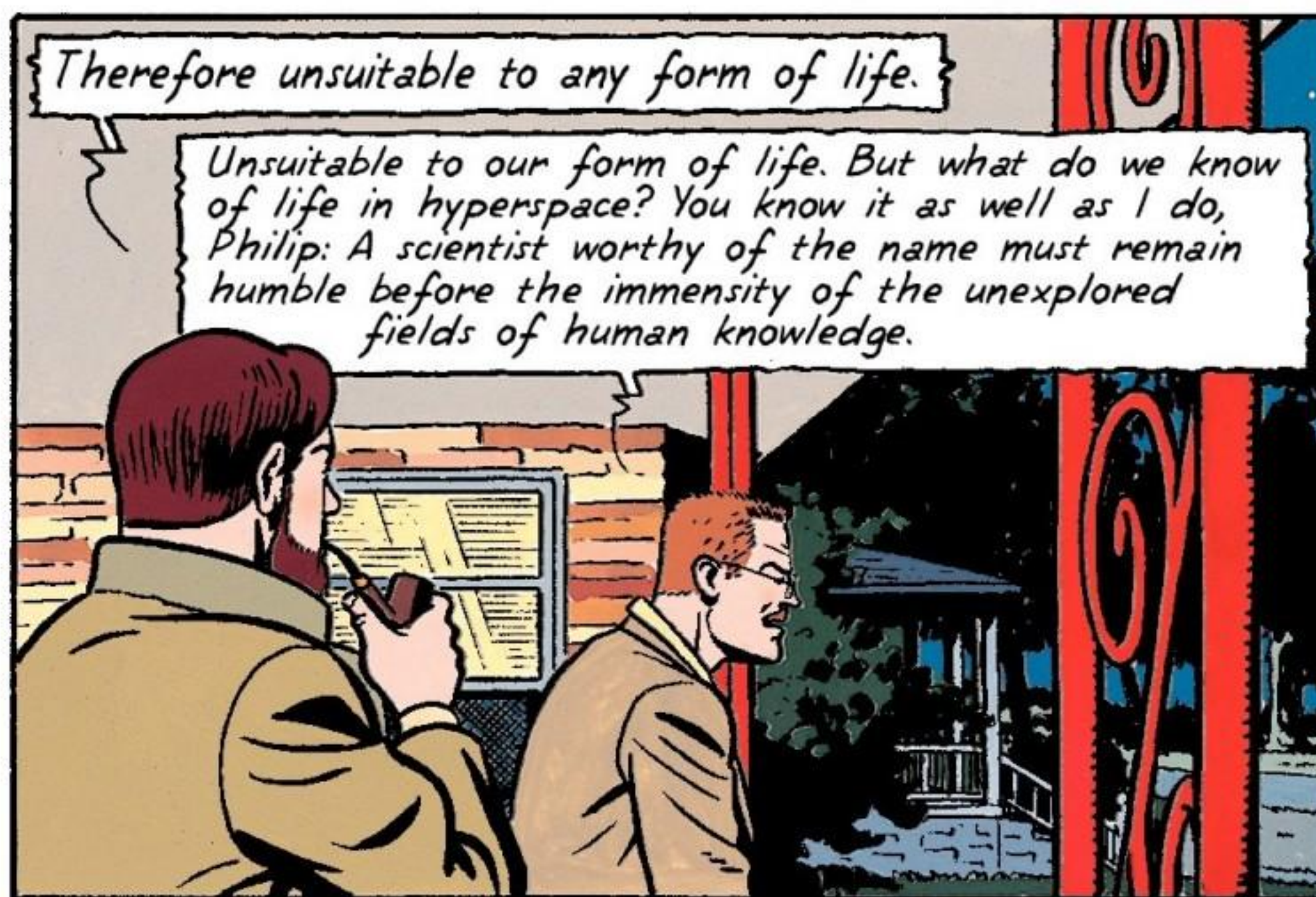


Perhaps. The word "Plutonian", on the other hand, seems more interesting to me. It's the best proof that Macquarrie, a man of the 18th century, came into contact with beings from outer space, since planet Pluto was only discovered in 1930 by the American Tombaugh.

What do we know about it?

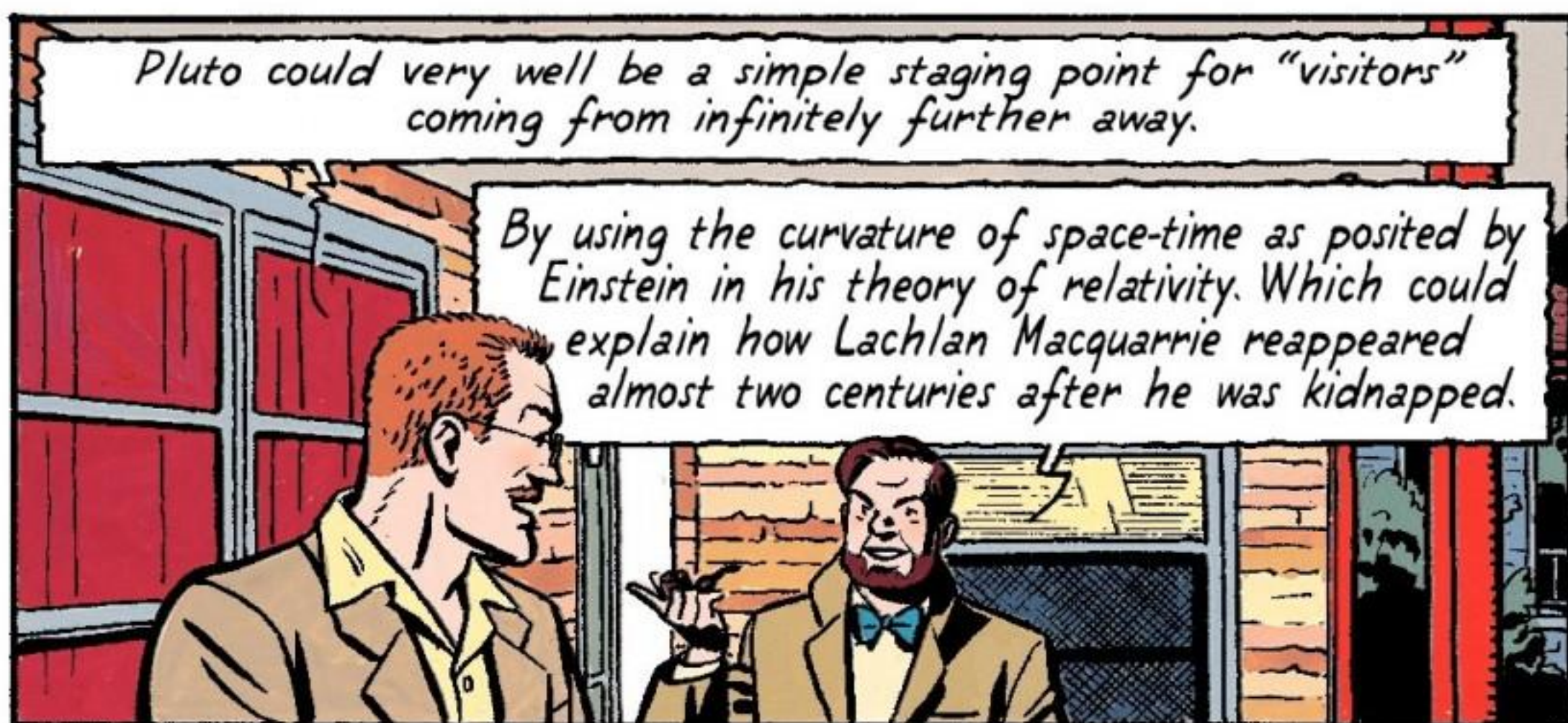


Not very much, except that it's the smallest and most distant planet of our solar system. It is 5.75 billion km away from here, has a diameter of just 2300 km, and its mass is 0.0022 times that of Earth. It is believed, but without certainty, that it is a rocky planet covered in ice and frozen methane, that its surface temperature is around the -220 C mark and that its atmosphere is composed of methane and nitrogen.



Therefore unsuitable to any form of life.

Unsuitable to our form of life. But what do we know of life in hyperspace? You know it as well as I do, Philip: A scientist worthy of the name must remain humble before the immensity of the unexplored fields of human knowledge.



Pluto could very well be a simple staging point for "visitors" coming from infinitely further away.

By using the curvature of space-time as posited by Einstein in his theory of relativity. Which could explain how Lachlan Macquarrie reappeared almost two centuries after he was kidnapped.



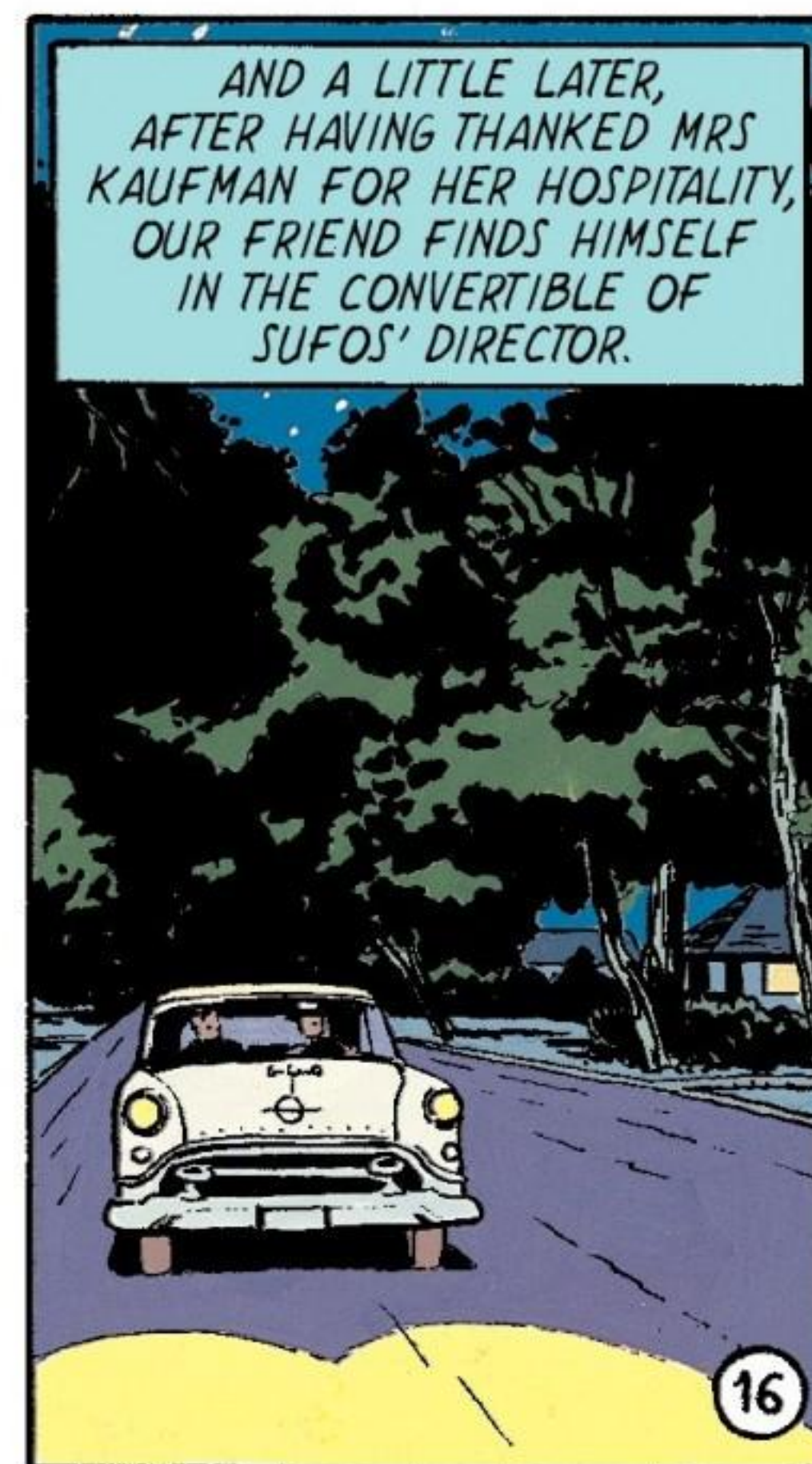
THE NEXT MOMENT, DEFEATED BY JETLAG, MORTIMER FAILS TO CONTAIN AN IRRESISTIBLE YAWN.

Waaaaah... This is all quite fascinating, Walter. Unfortunately, I fear I must postpone the rest of our conversation until tomorrow. I'm starting to have trouble keeping my eyes open.

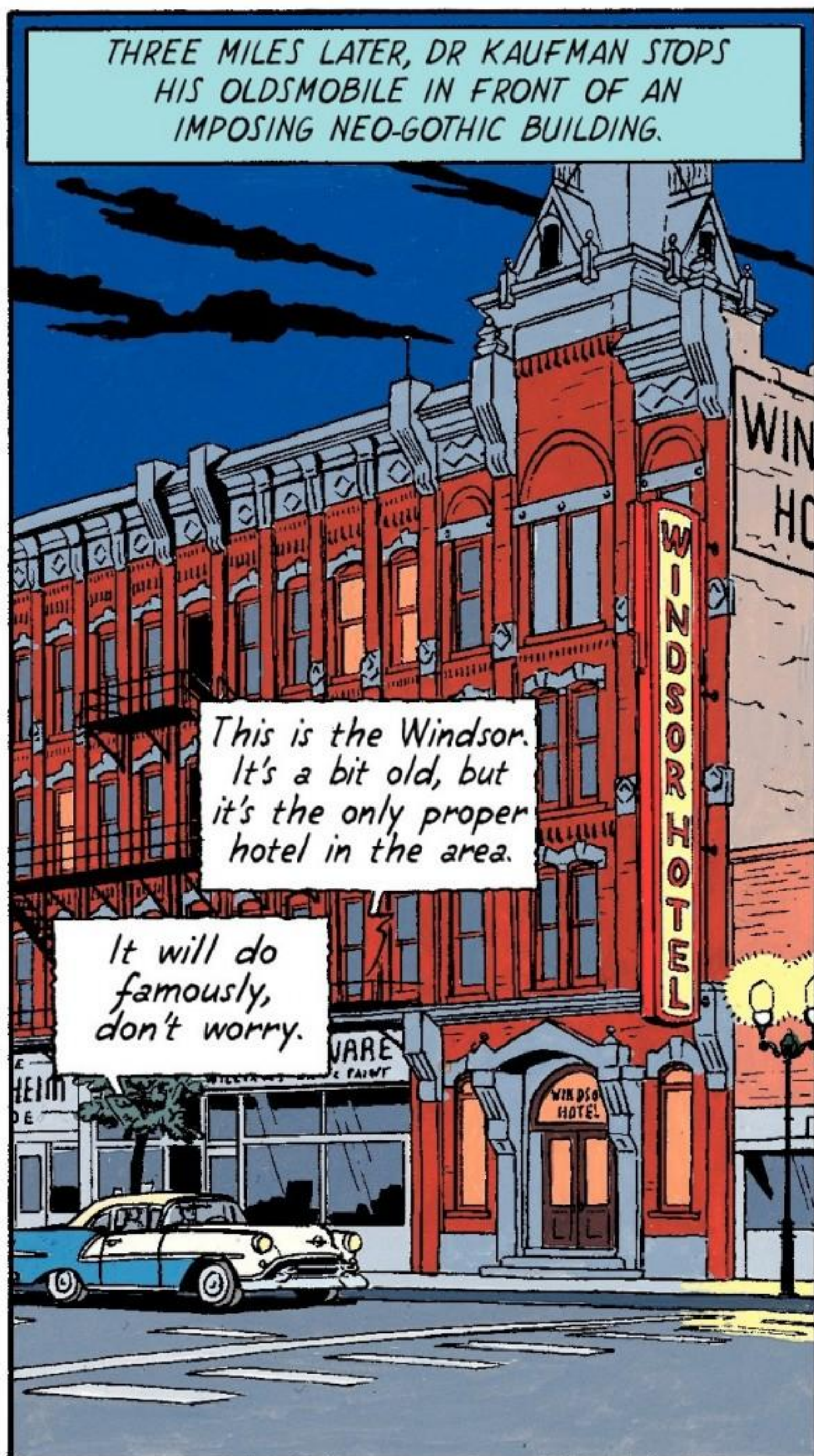


I'm sorry, Philip. I was so caught up in our subject that I forgot how exhausted you must be. I'll take you to your hotel immediately.

Bah, after a good night's sleep I'll be back to my best, don't worry.



AND A LITTLE LATER, AFTER HAVING THANKED MRS KAUFMAN FOR HER HOSPITALITY, OUR FRIEND FINDS HIMSELF IN THE CONVERTIBLE OF SUFOS' DIRECTOR.





... AN ALARMING SILHOUETTE SILENTLY CLIMBS THE FIRE-ESCAPE STAIRS AT THE BACK OF THE BUILDING.



HAVING REACHED MORTIMER'S FLOOR THE STRANGER SILENTLY LIFTS THE WINDOW, WHICH HAS BEEN LEFT OPEN A CRACK...



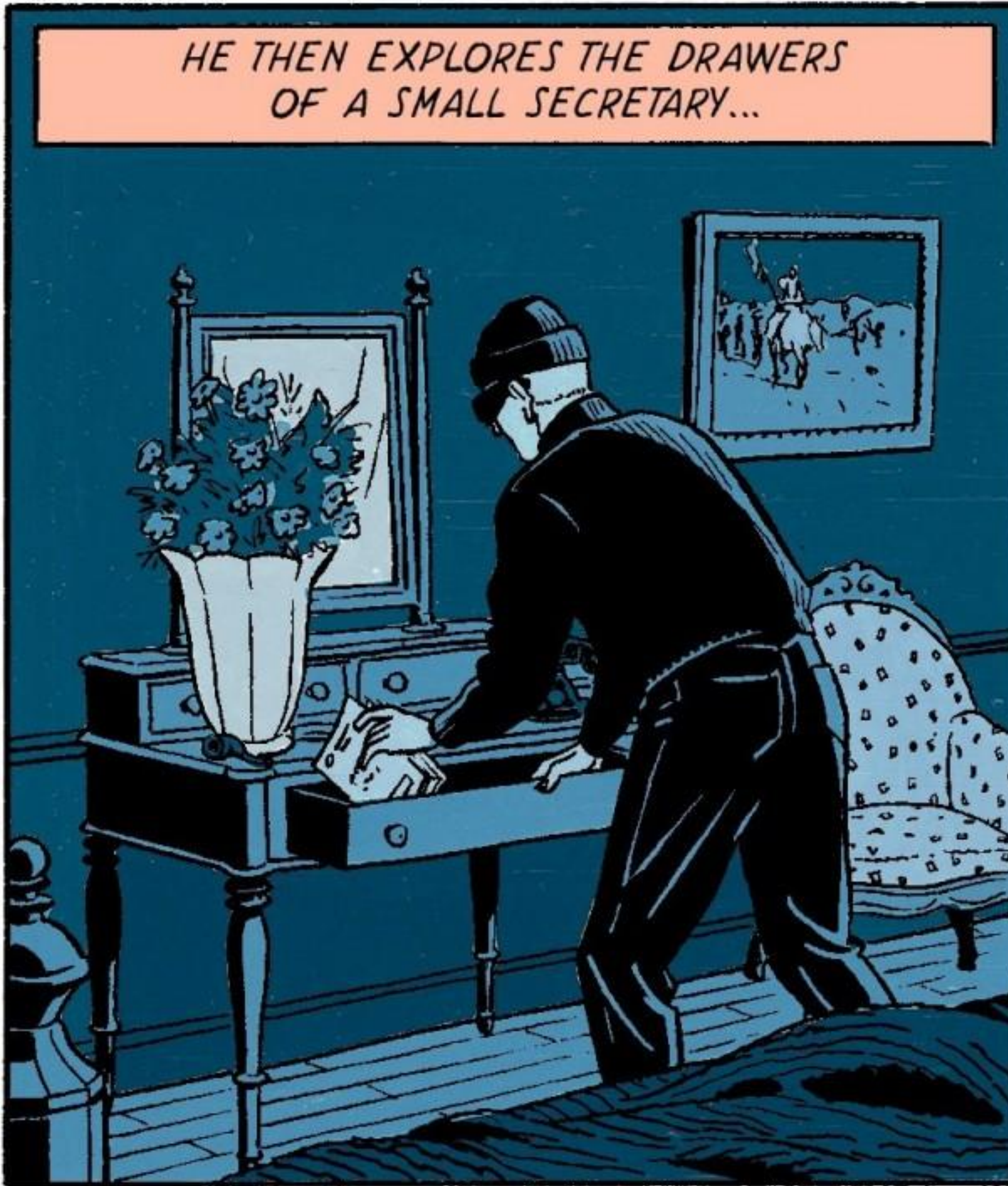
... AND SNEAKS, CATLIKE, INTO THE ROOM.



SEEMINGLY UNHINDERED BY THE DARK, THE INTRUDER BEGINS SEARCHING THE PROFESSOR'S CLOTHES...



... AND LOOKS VERY DISAPPOINTED NOT TO FIND WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR.



HE THEN EXPLORES THE DRAWERS OF A SMALL SECRETARY...



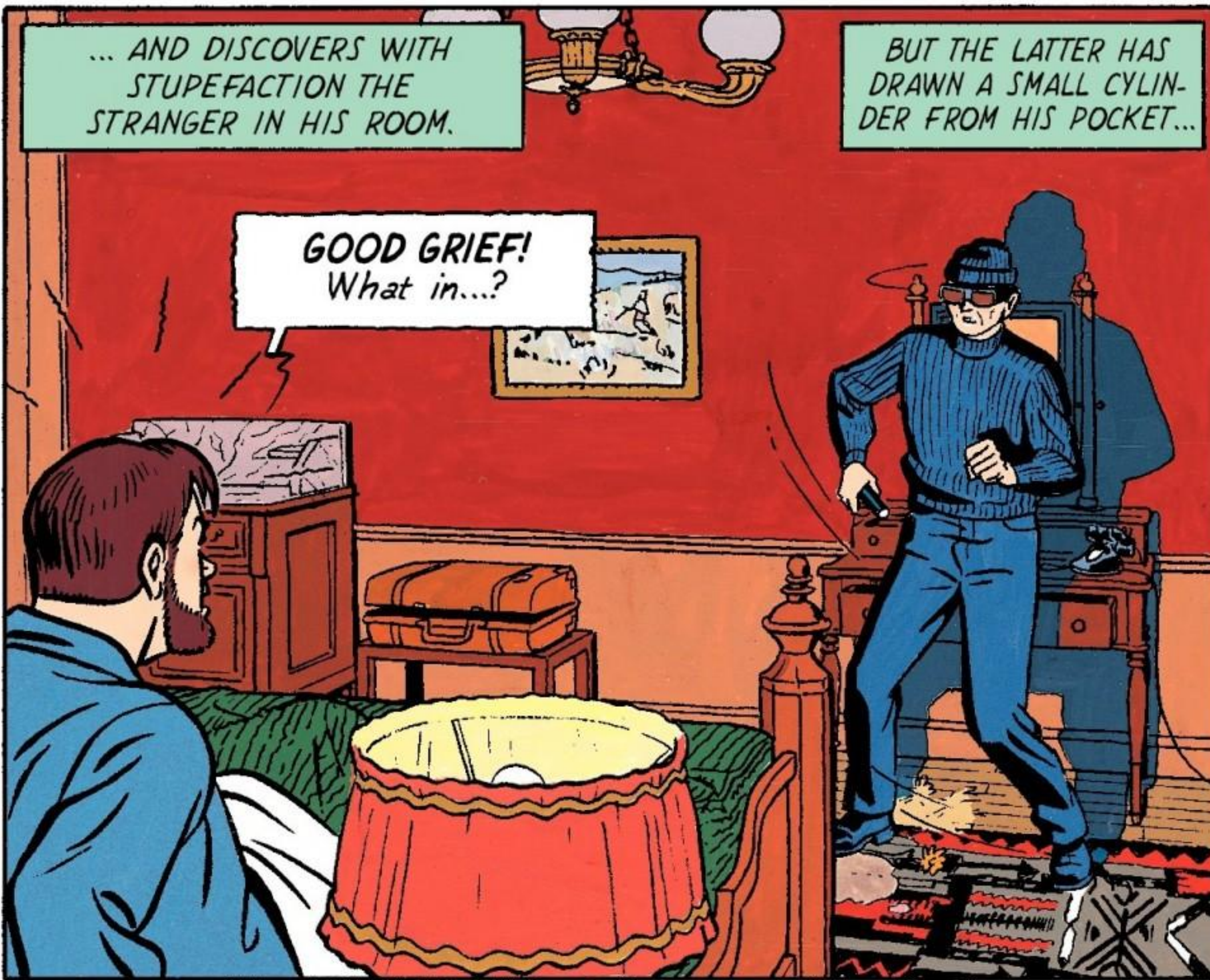
... BUT IN HIS ANXIETY KNOCKS OVER A VASE...



... WHICH SHATTERS NOISILY ON THE FLOOR.



STARTLED AWAKE, MORTIMER TURNS ON HIS BEDSIDE LAMP...



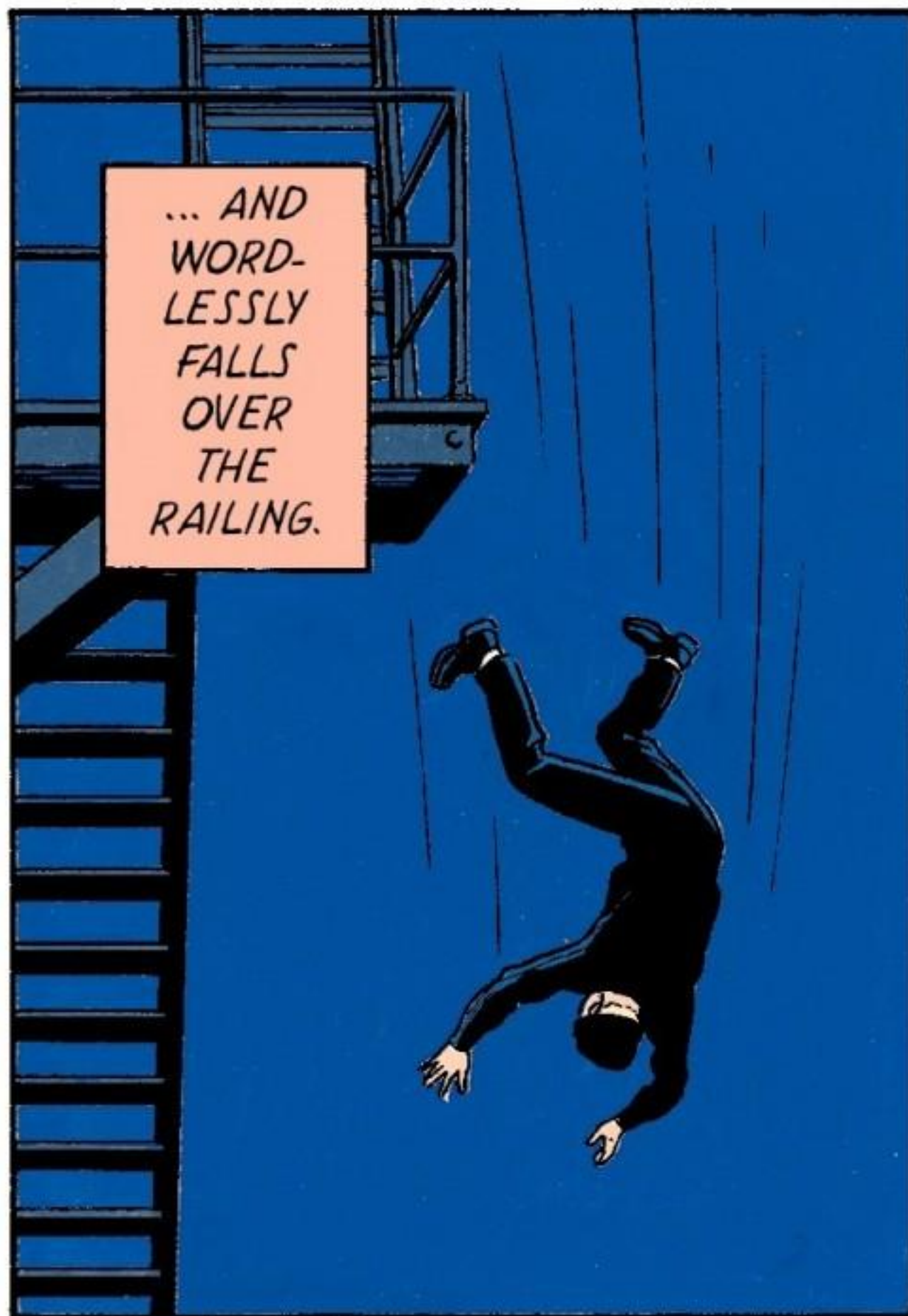
... AND DISCOVERS WITH STUPEFACTION THE STRANGER IN HIS ROOM.

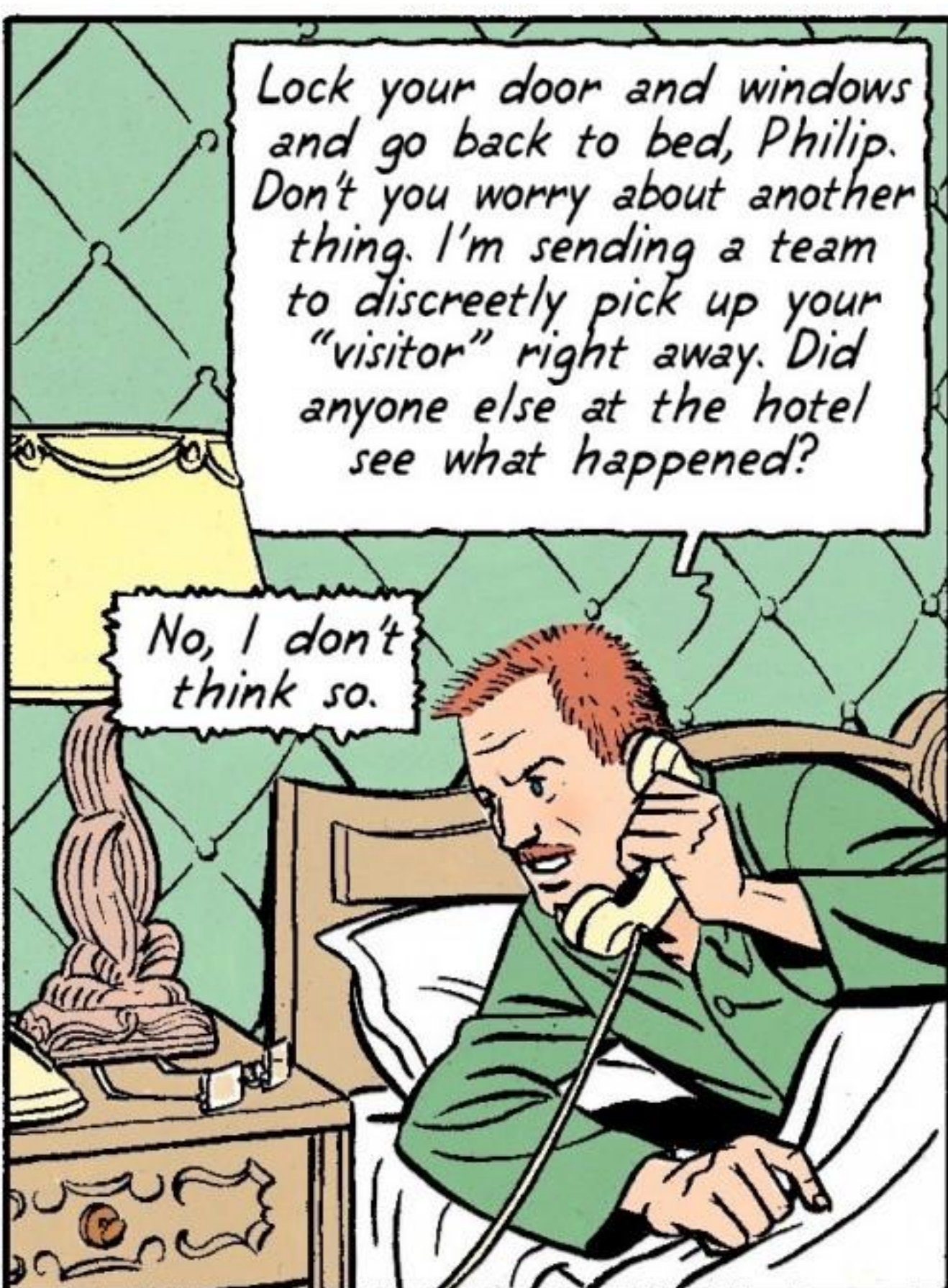
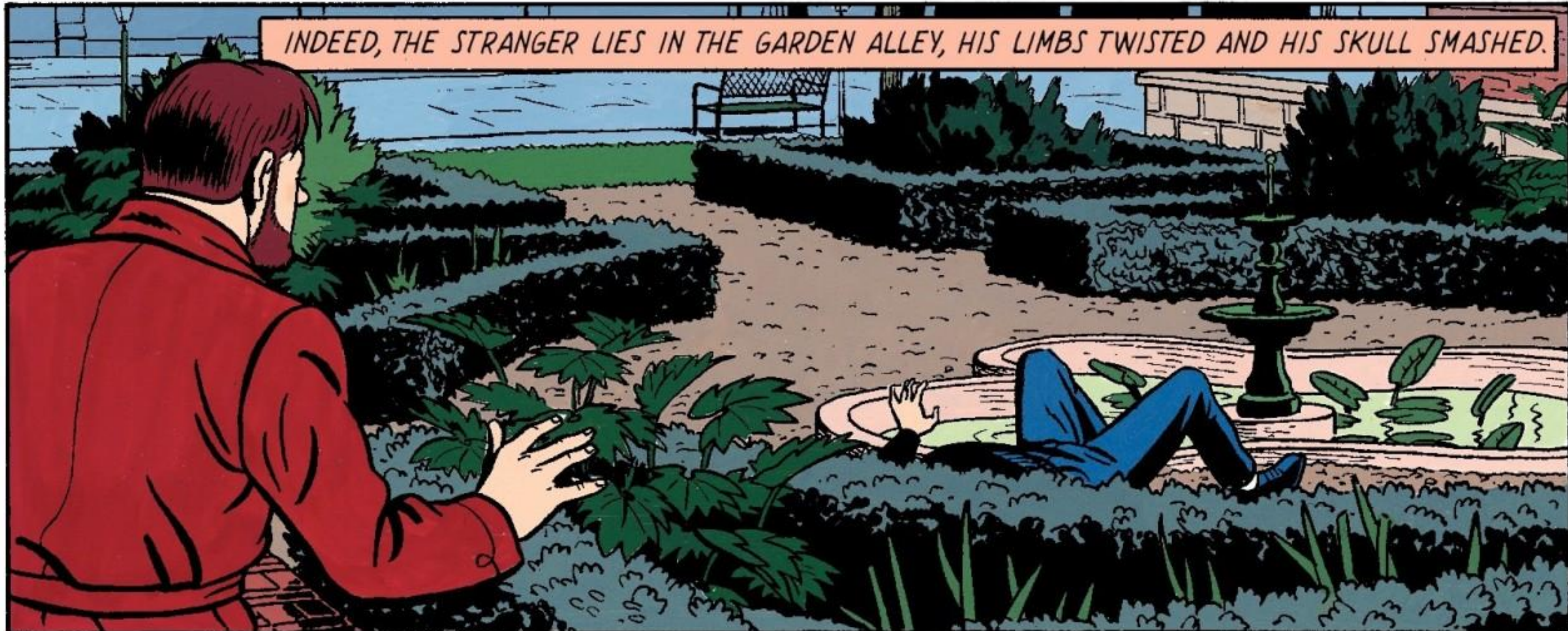
GOOD GRIEF!
What in...?

BUT THE LATTER HAS DRAWN A SMALL CYLINDER FROM HIS POCKET...



... AND THE PROFESSOR CAN ONLY ROLL ASIDE HURRIEDLY TO AVOID BEING HIT IN THE HEAD BY THE BEAM ISSUING FROM IT.

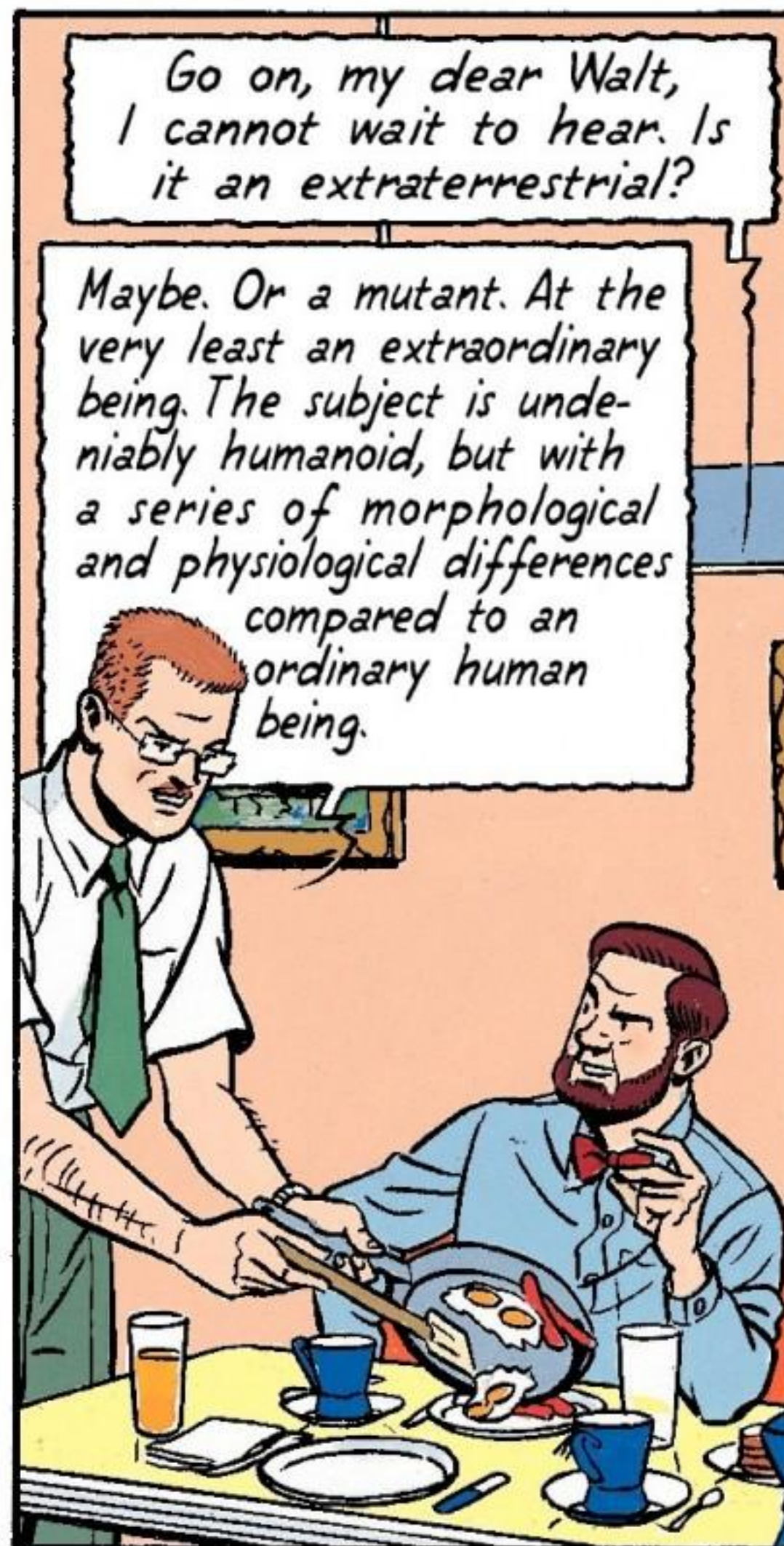




THE NEXT DAY, AFTER A VERY BAD NIGHT'S SLEEP, MORTIMER IS HAVING A LATE BREAKFAST AT THE HOME OF DR KAUFMAN, WHOSE WIFE HAS LEFT FOR THE MORNING AFTER TAKING THE KIDS TO SCHOOL.

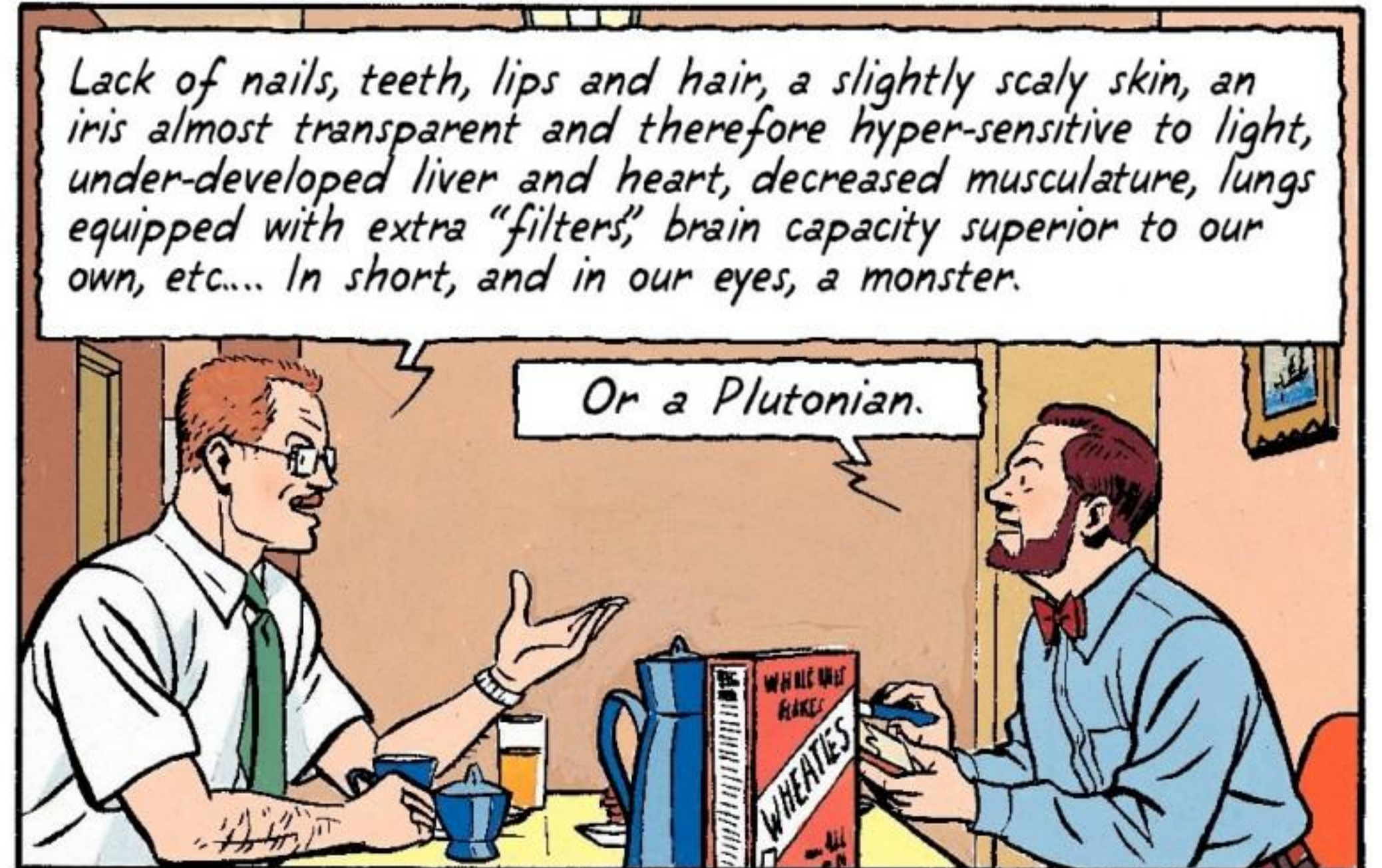


I had the body of your aggressor examined by the CSS medical team immediately. They spent the whole night over it, but the results were worth it.



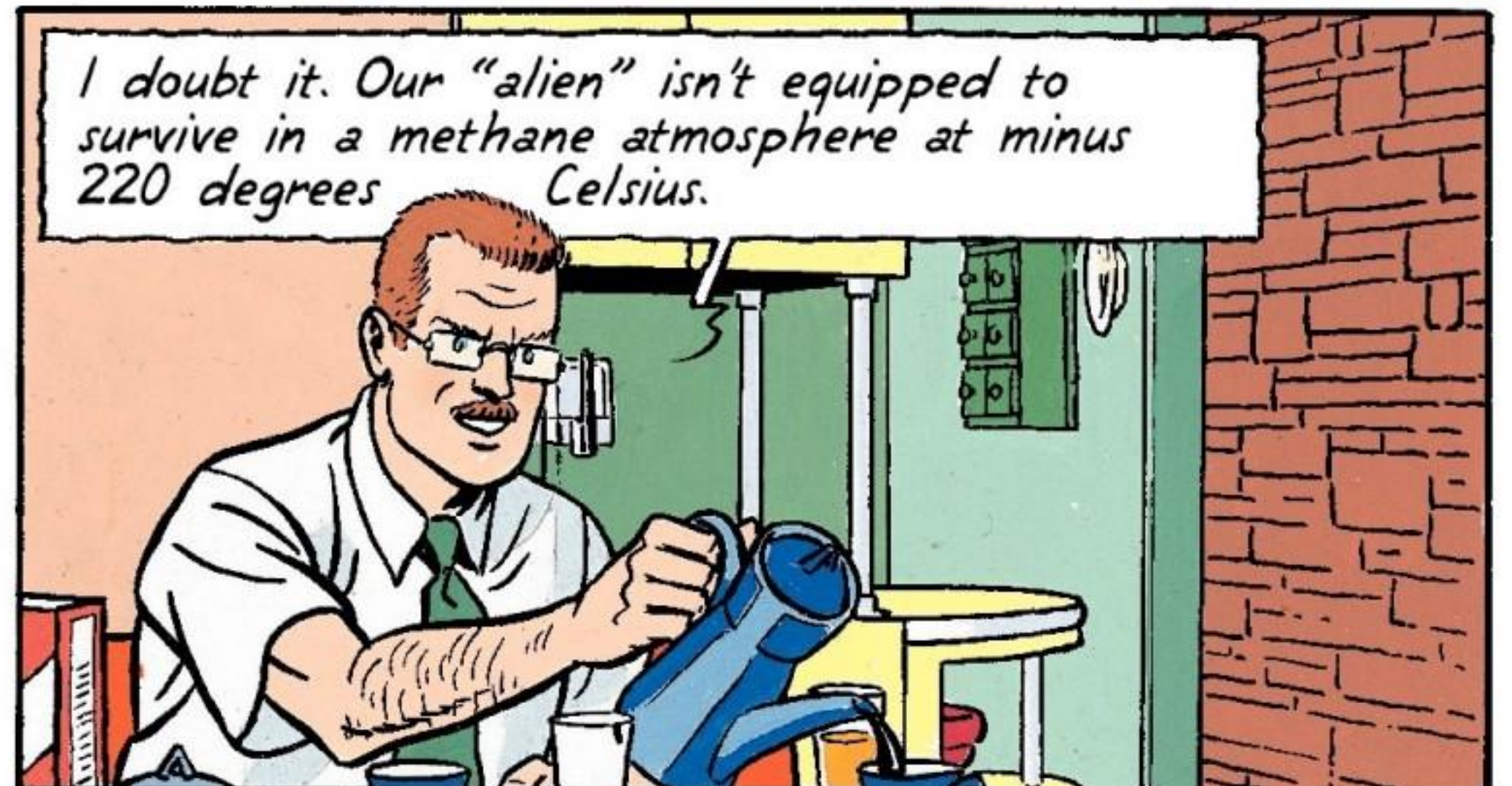
Go on, my dear Walt, I cannot wait to hear. Is it an extraterrestrial?

Maybe. Or a mutant. At the very least an extraordinary being. The subject is undeniably humanoid, but with a series of morphological and physiological differences compared to an ordinary human being.



Lack of nails, teeth, lips and hair, a slightly scaly skin, an iris almost transparent and therefore hyper-sensitive to light, under-developed liver and heart, decreased musculature, lungs equipped with extra "filters," brain capacity superior to our own, etc.... In short, and in our eyes, a monster.

Or a Plutonian.



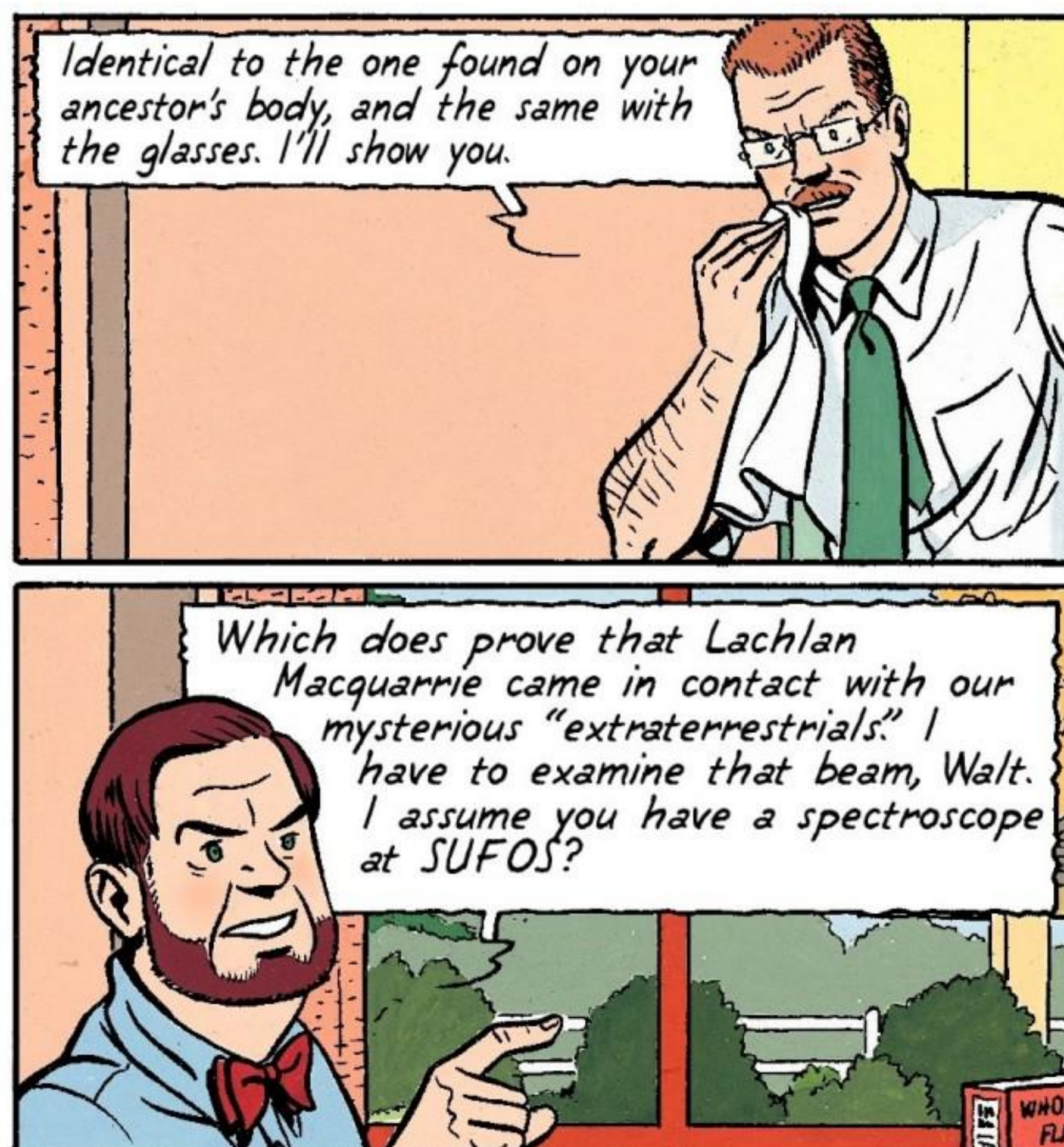
I doubt it. Our "alien" isn't equipped to survive in a methane atmosphere at minus 220 degrees Celsius.



Unless we're talking about a civilisation that lives in an enclosed environment with artificial atmosphere. Or beings from another galaxy.

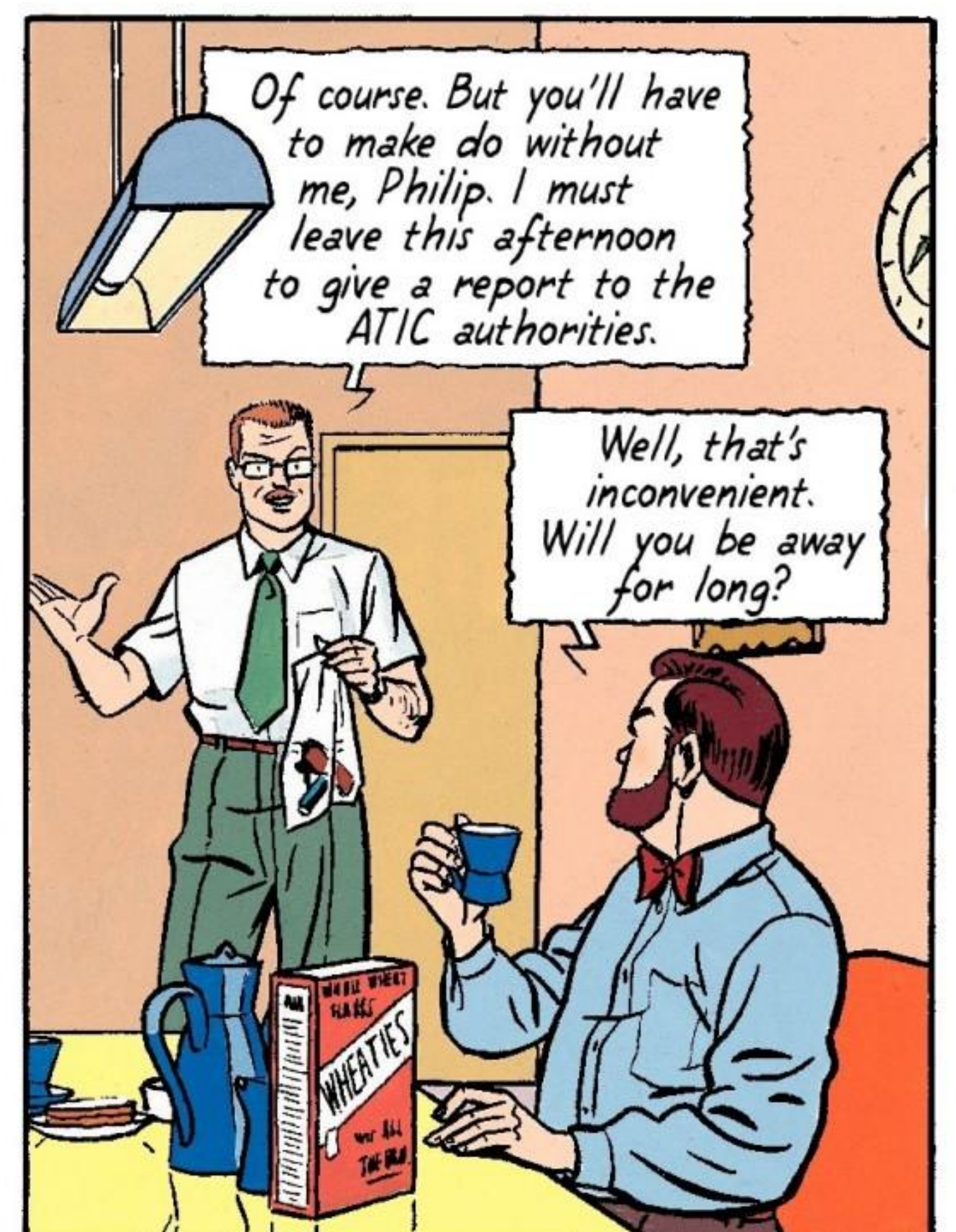
It's possible. At this stage, we cannot rule out any hypothesis. But I must admit I'm rather lost at sea here.

And what about my aggressor's ray gun?



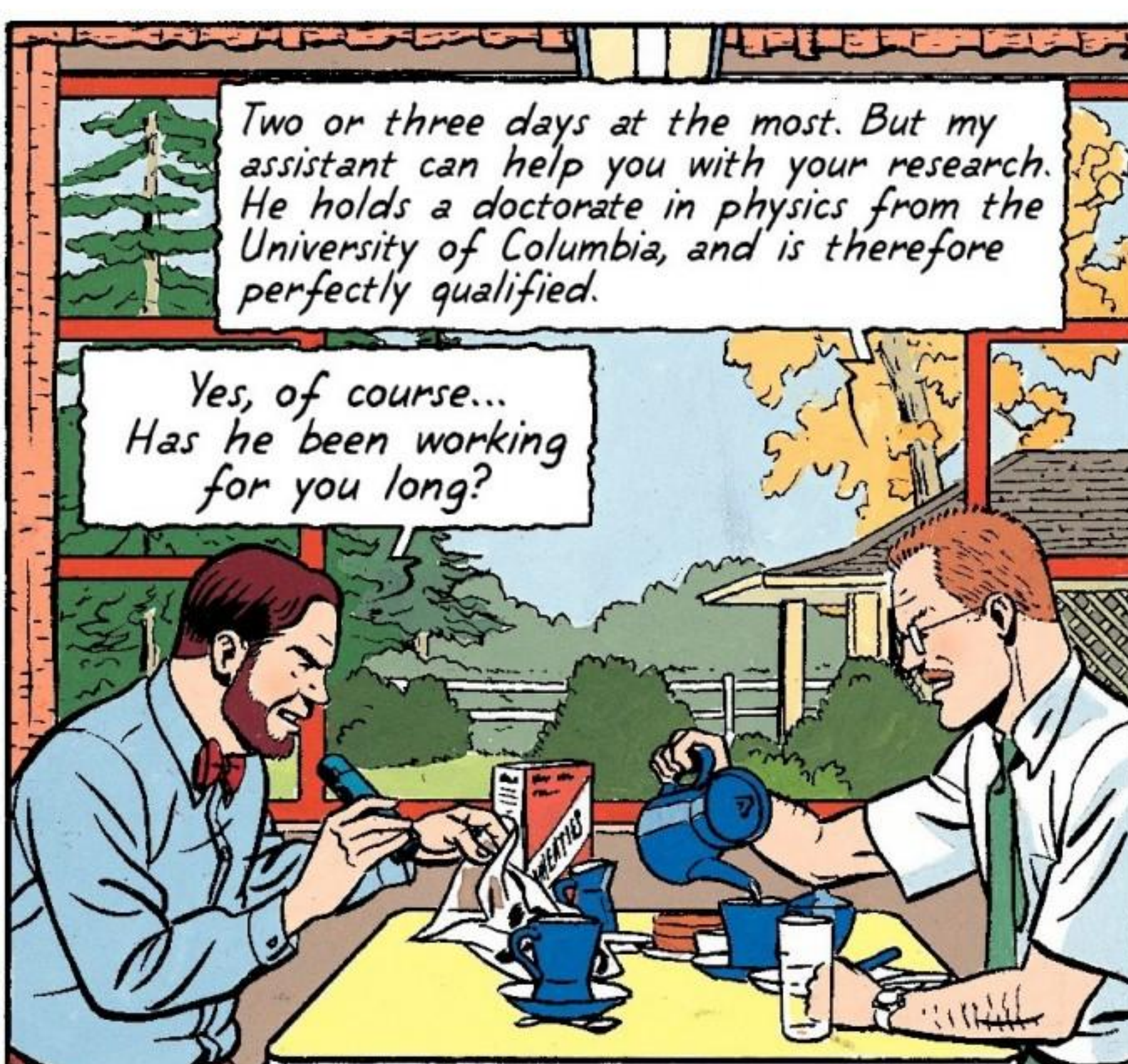
Identical to the one found on your ancestor's body, and the same with the glasses. I'll show you.

Which does prove that Lachlan Macquarrie came in contact with our mysterious "extraterrestrials." I have to examine that beam, Walt. I assume you have a spectroscope at SUFOS?



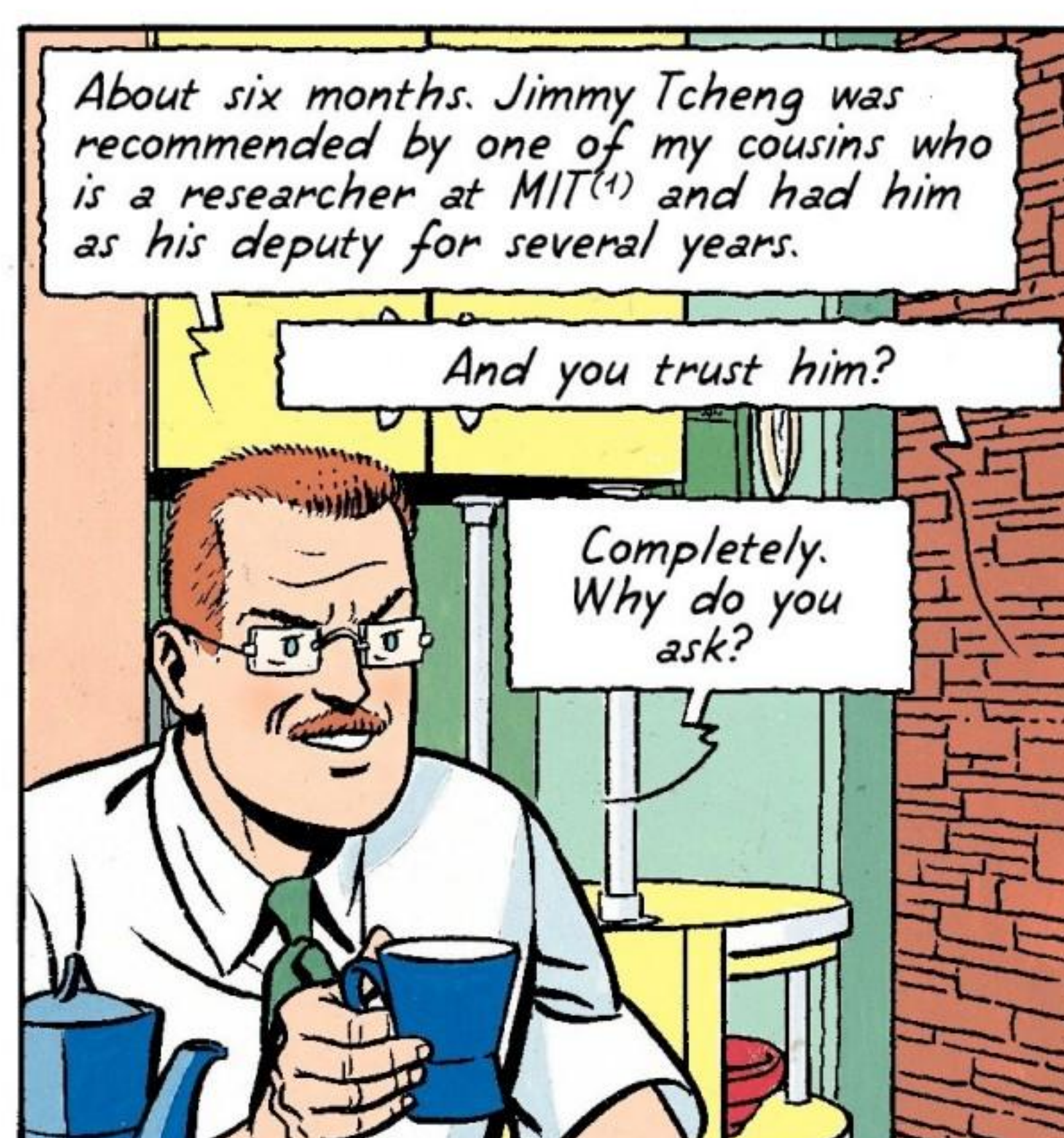
Of course. But you'll have to make do without me, Philip. I must leave this afternoon to give a report to the ATIC authorities.

Well, that's inconvenient. Will you be away for long?



Two or three days at the most. But my assistant can help you with your research. He holds a doctorate in physics from the University of Columbia, and is therefore perfectly qualified.

Yes, of course... Has he been working for you long?



About six months. Jimmy Tcheng was recommended by one of my cousins who is a researcher at MIT⁽¹⁾ and had him as his deputy for several years.

And you trust him?

Completely. Why do you ask?



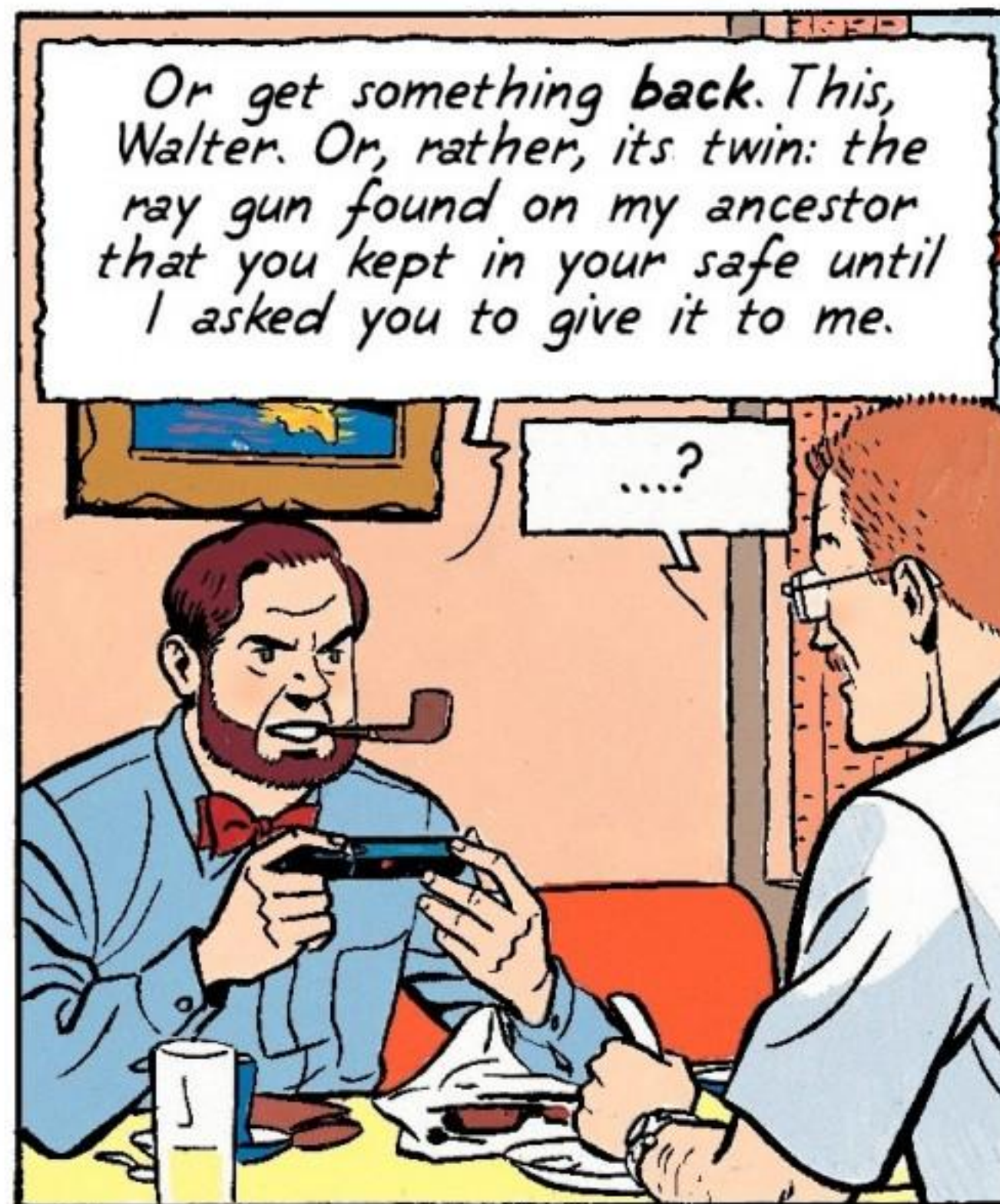
Because something is bothering me, my dear Walt...

(1) Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Why do you think our "extraterrestrial" broke into my room last night?

Well, I... I don't know. I was so excited over discovering him that I didn't even wonder about that. No doubt he wanted to steal something...



Or get something back. This, Walter. Or, rather, its twin: the ray gun found on my ancestor that you kept in your safe until I asked you to give it to me.

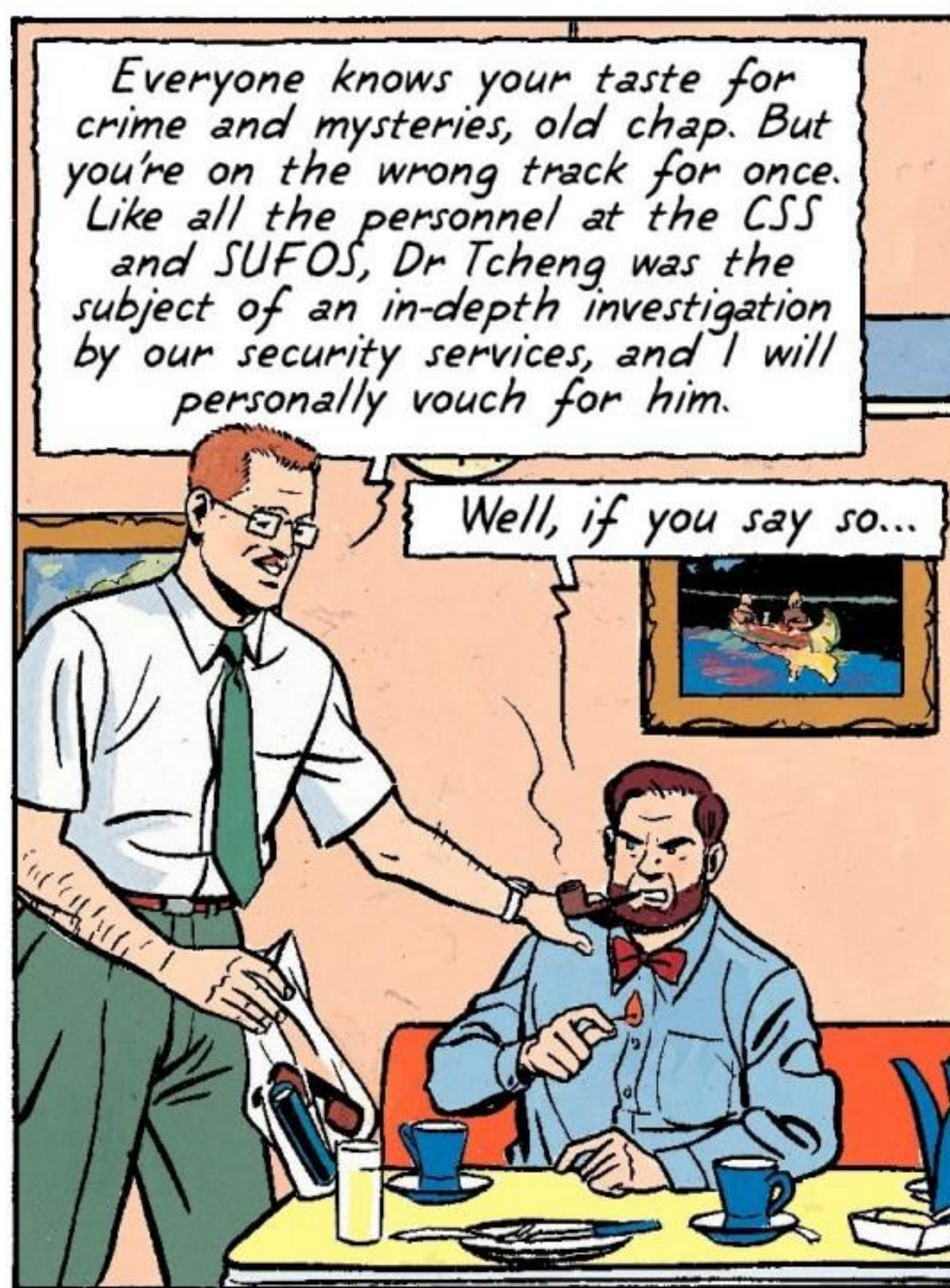
....?



Thus, no one, aside from Jimmy Tcheng and yourself, knew that I had this object in my possession. But what Mr Tcheng didn't know was that I gave it back to you before going to bed.

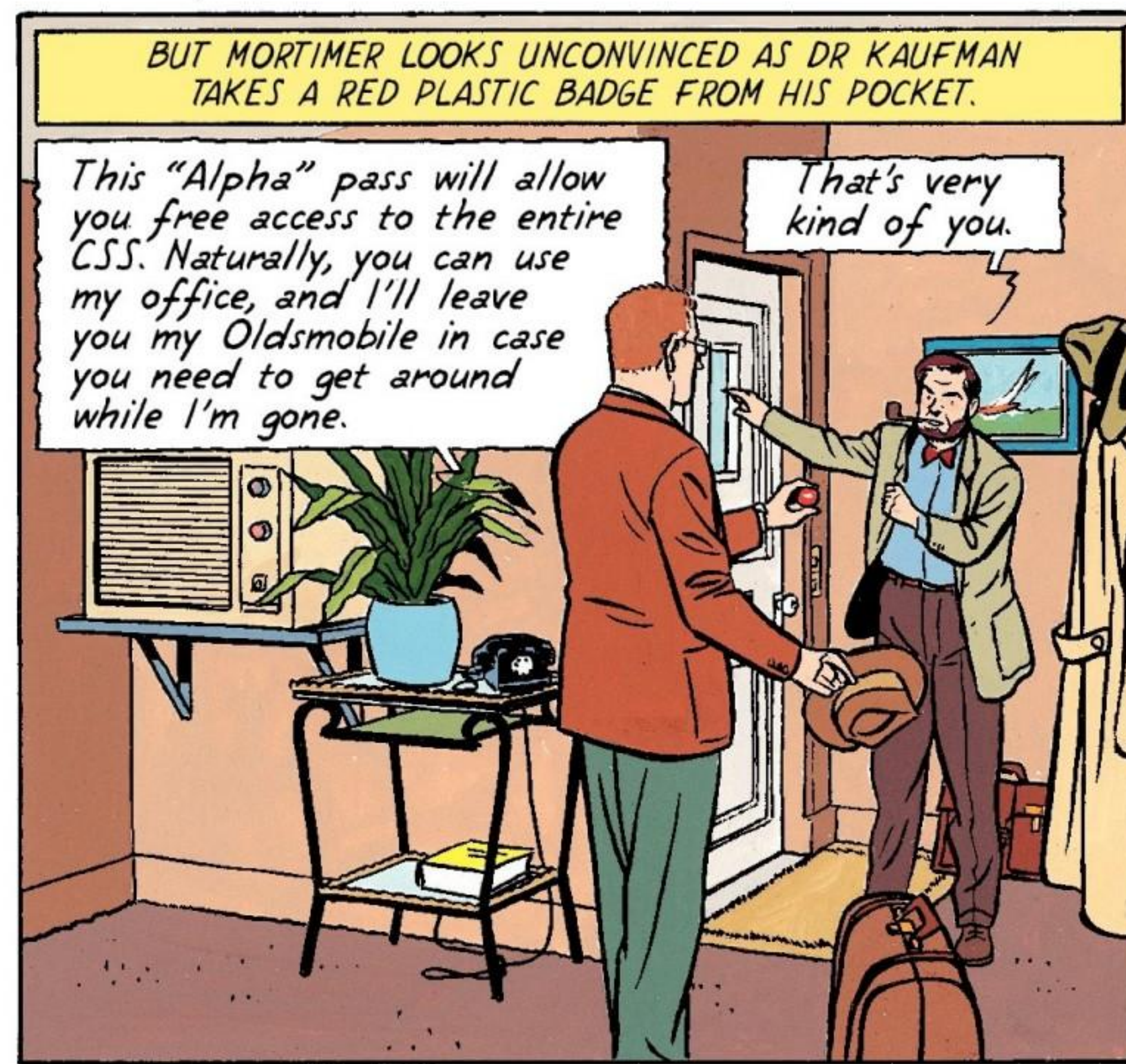


Ha! Ha! Ha!... What imagination you have, Professor Mortimer!...



Everyone knows your taste for crime and mysteries, old chap. But you're on the wrong track for once. Like all the personnel at the CSS and SUFOS, Dr Tcheng was the subject of an in-depth investigation by our security services, and I will personally vouch for him.

Well, if you say so...



BUT MORTIMER LOOKS UNCONVINCED AS DR KAUFMAN TAKES A RED PLASTIC BADGE FROM HIS POCKET.

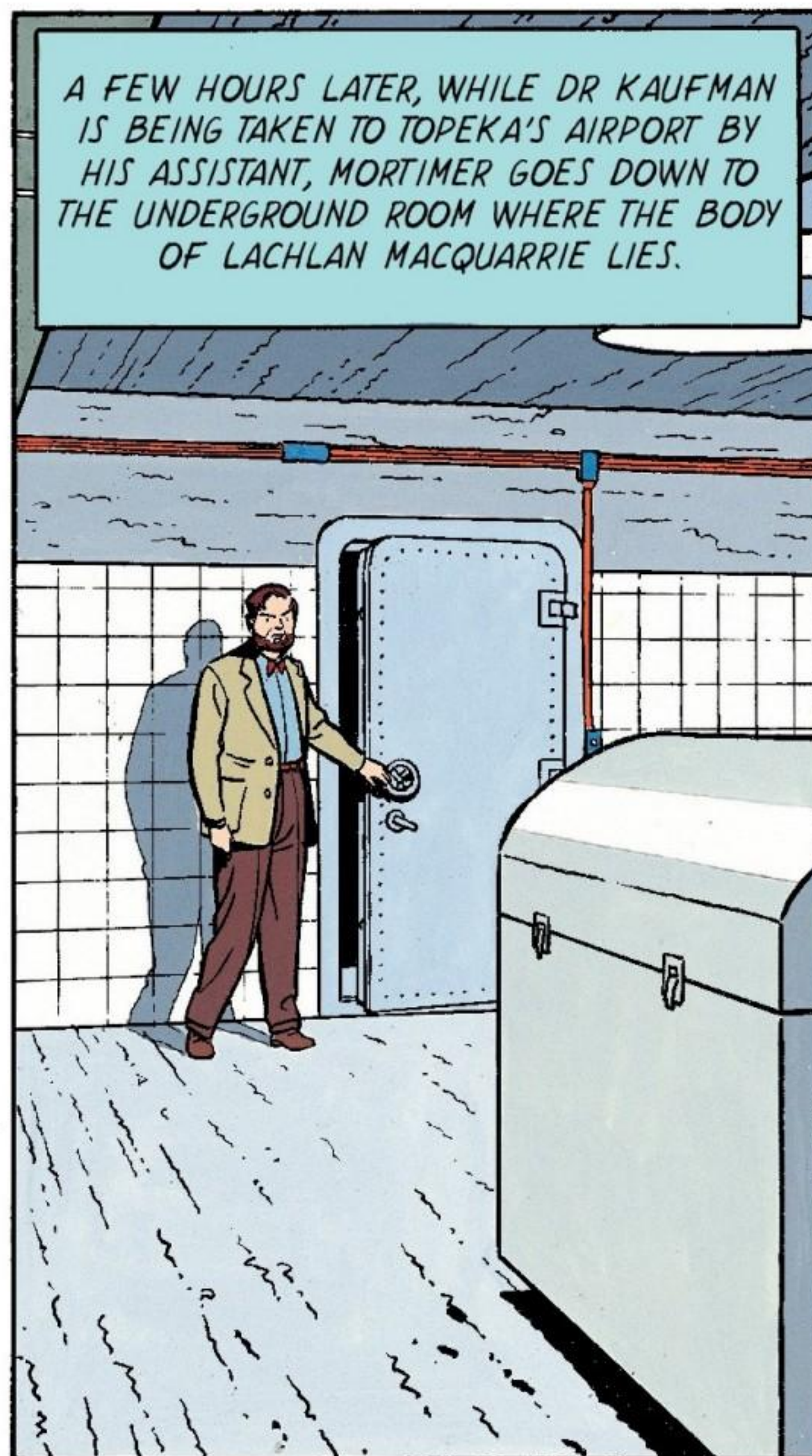
This "Alpha" pass will allow you free access to the entire CSS. Naturally, you can use my office, and I'll leave you my Oldsmobile in case you need to get around while I'm gone.

That's very kind of you.



Would you like me to ask Tcheng to have a makeshift room set up for you at the Centre? It won't be as comfortable as the hotel, but you'll be safe there.

That won't be necessary, Walt. After the failure of last night's attempt, I doubt our mysterious visitors will still have any interest in me. But don't worry: I will carefully lock the door and windows of my room.

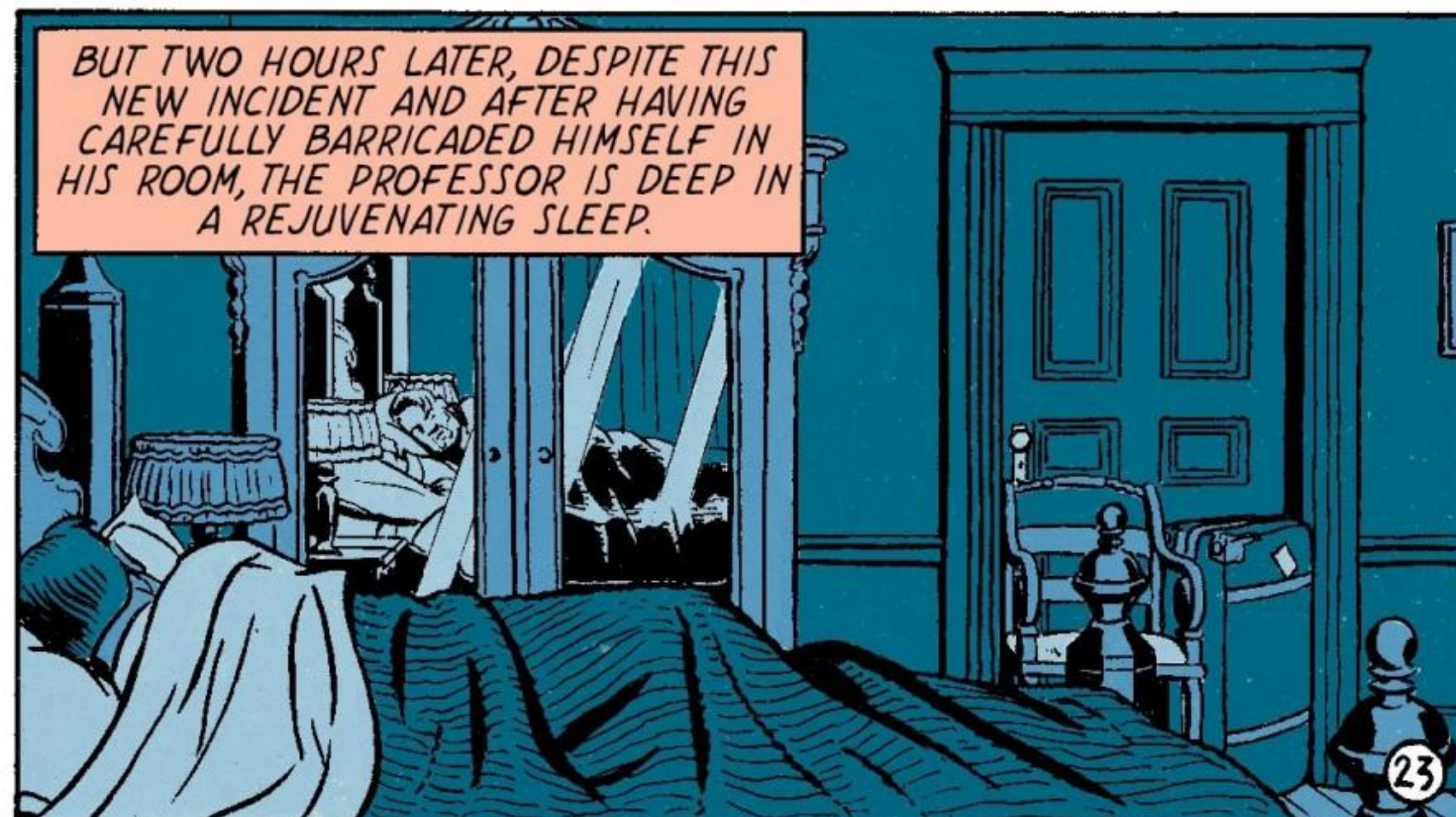
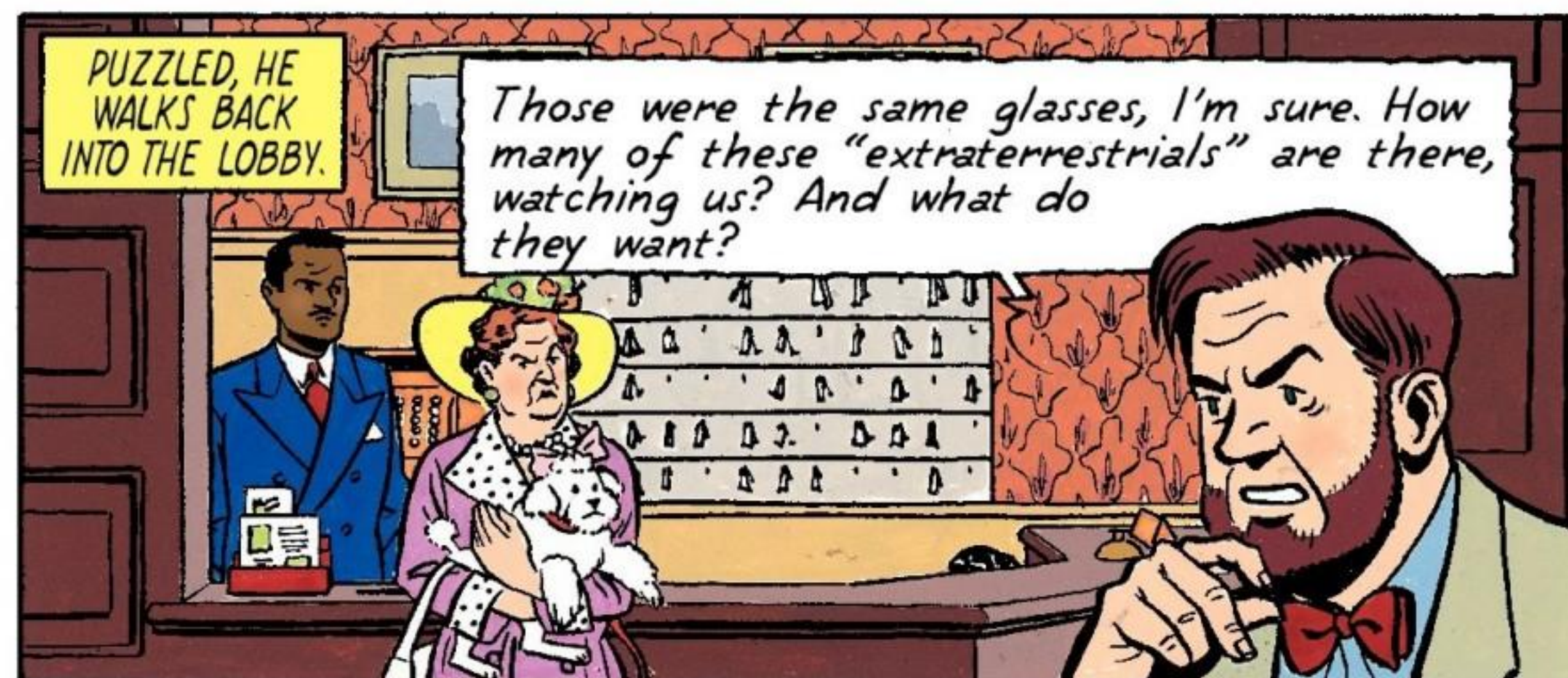
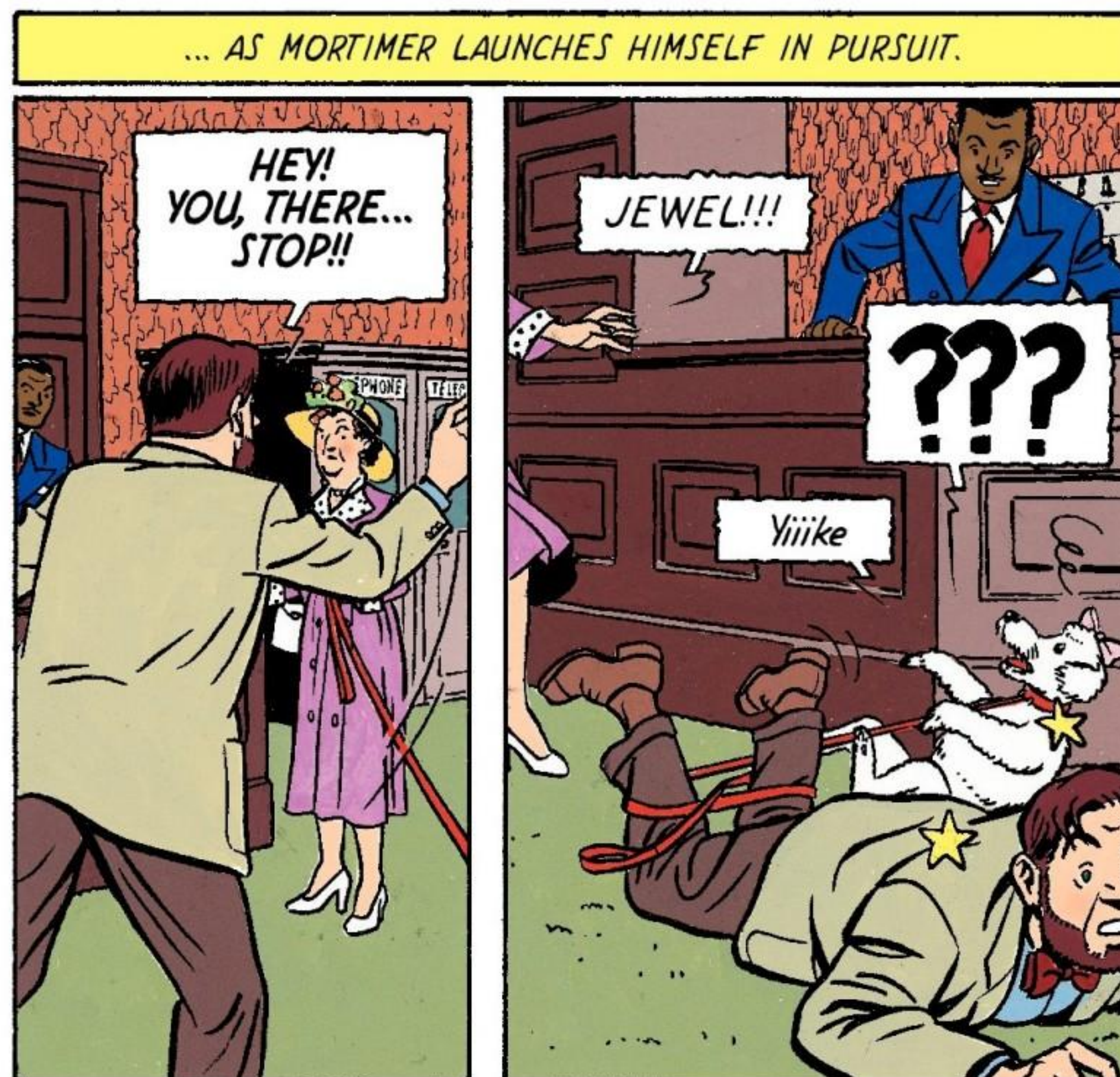
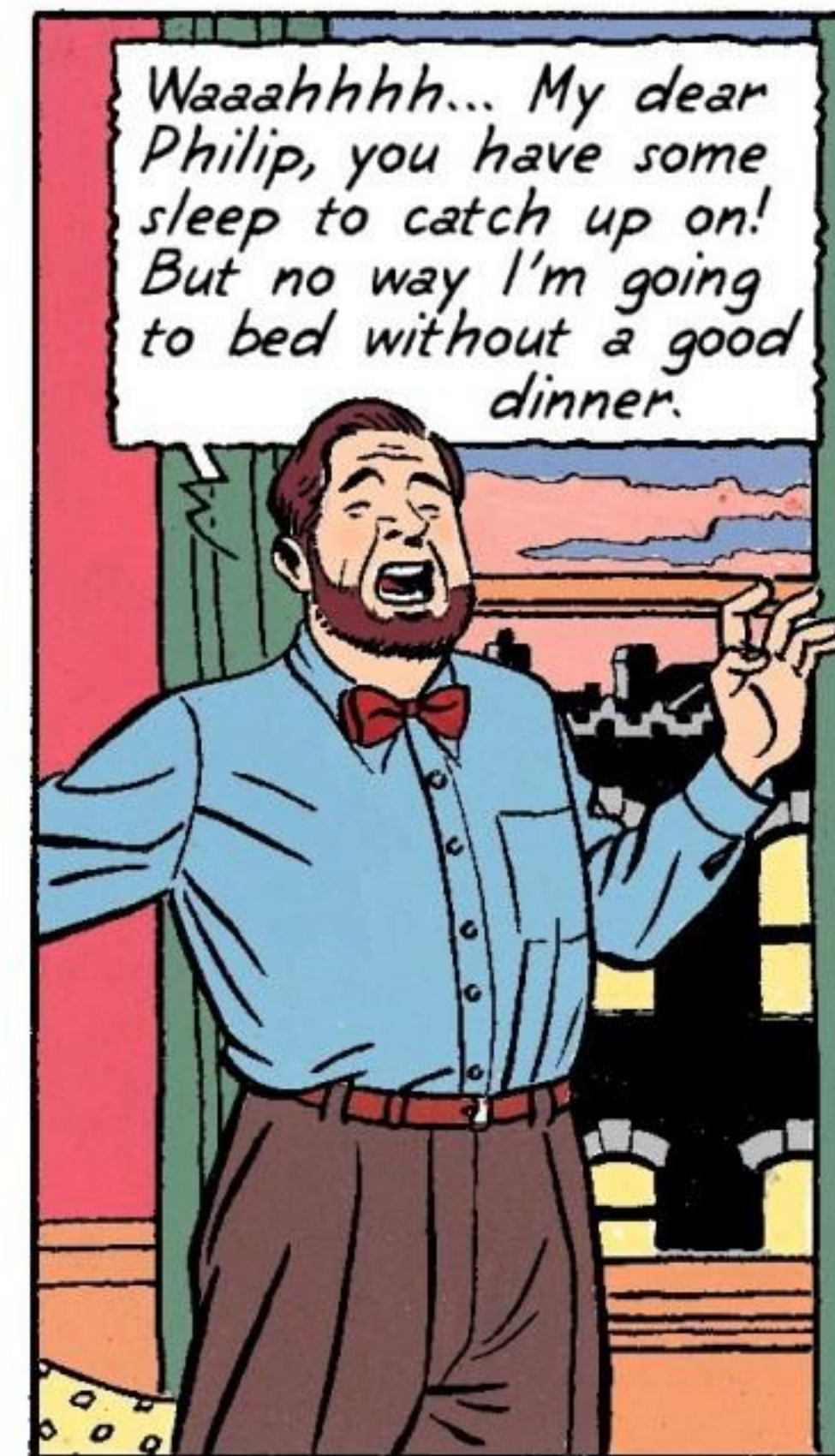


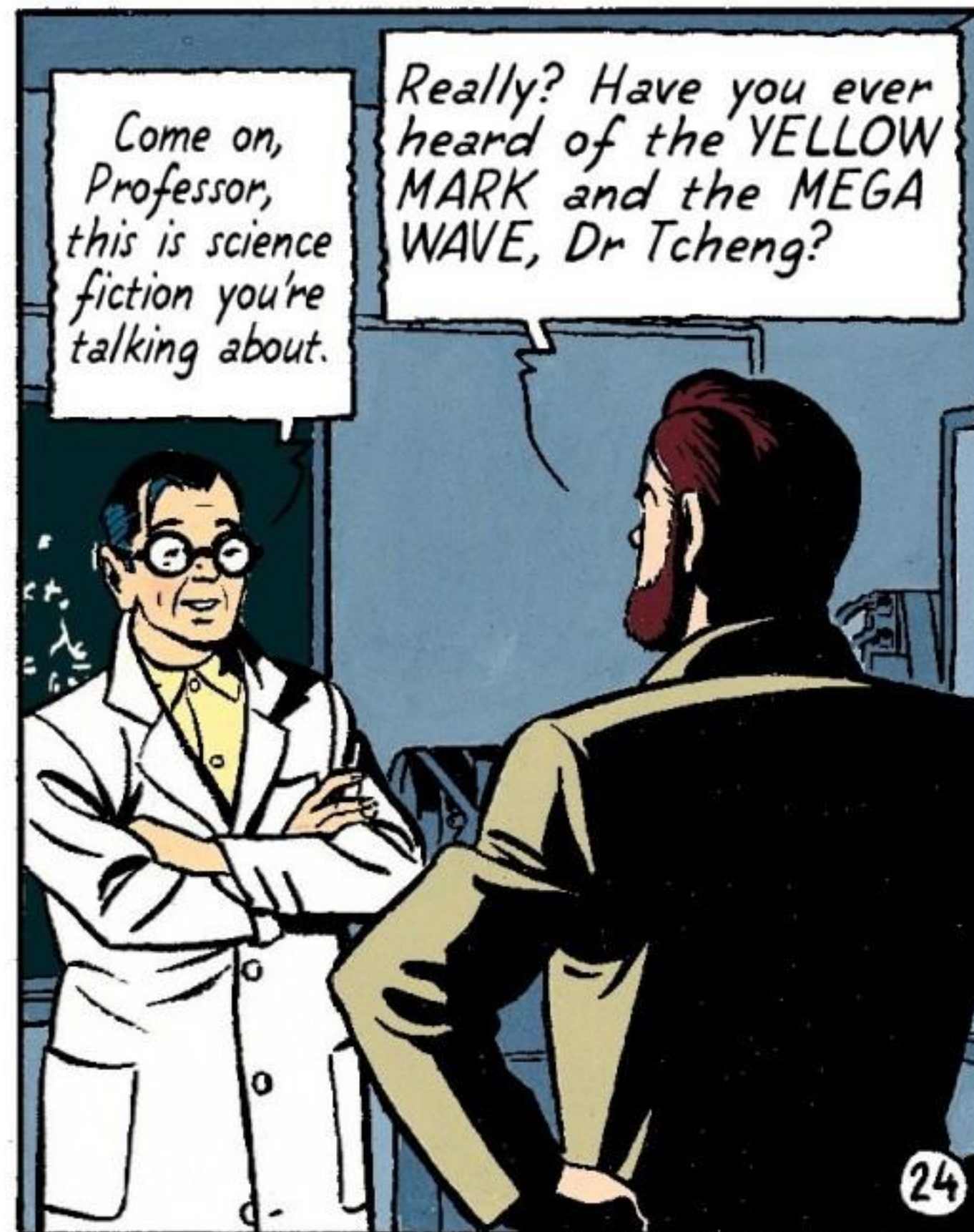
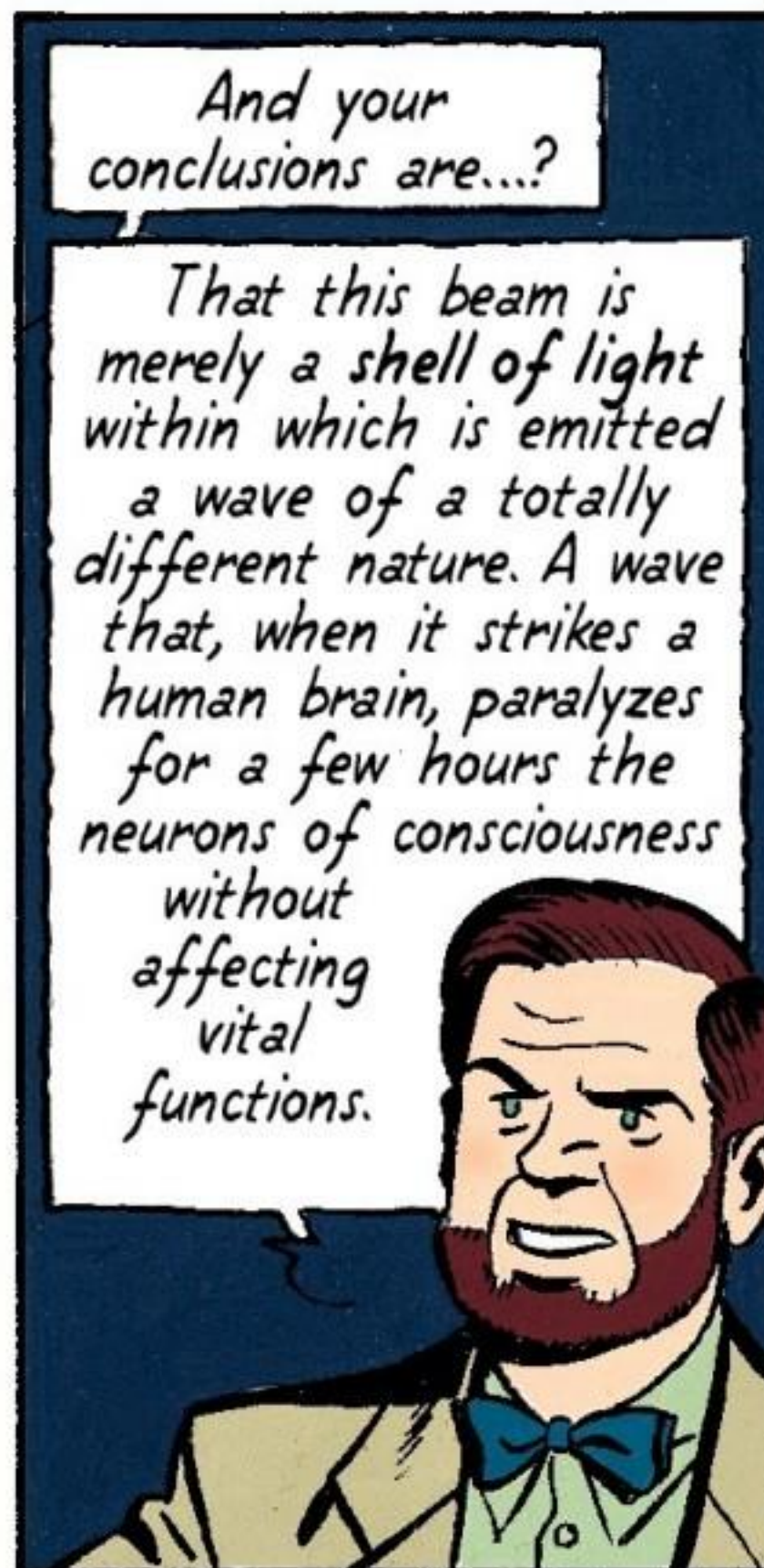
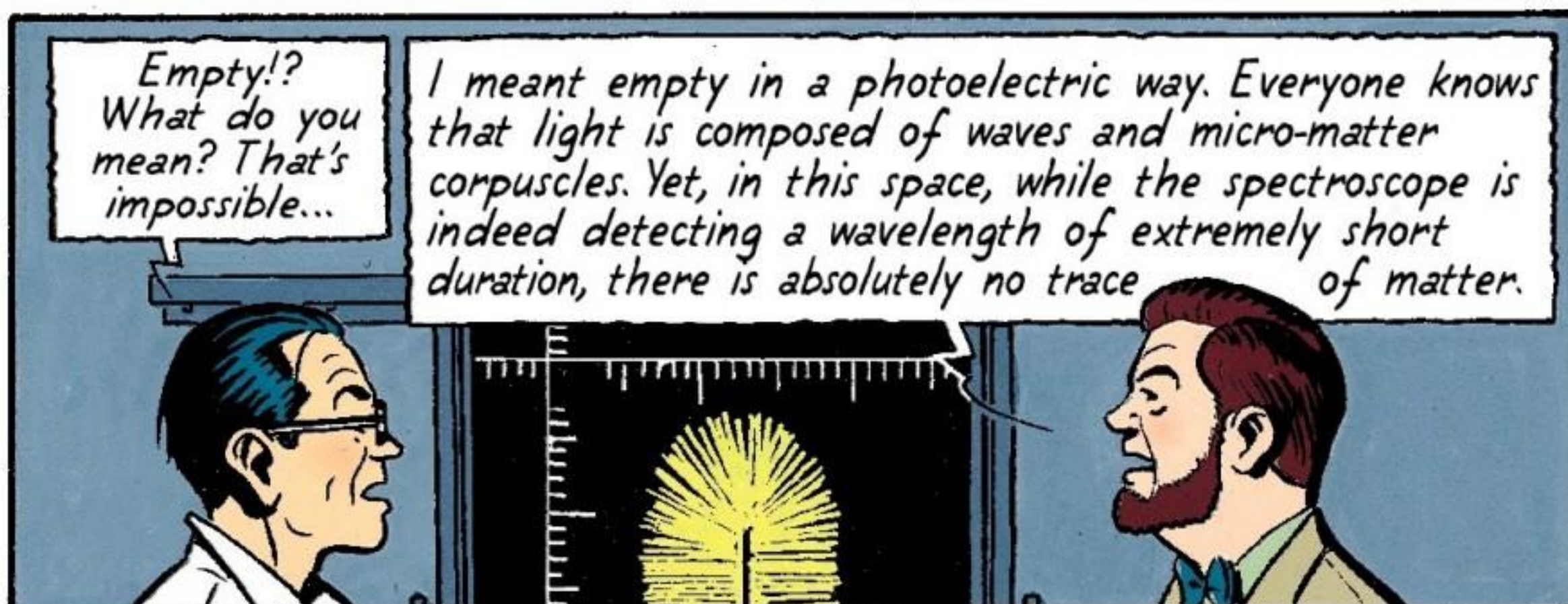
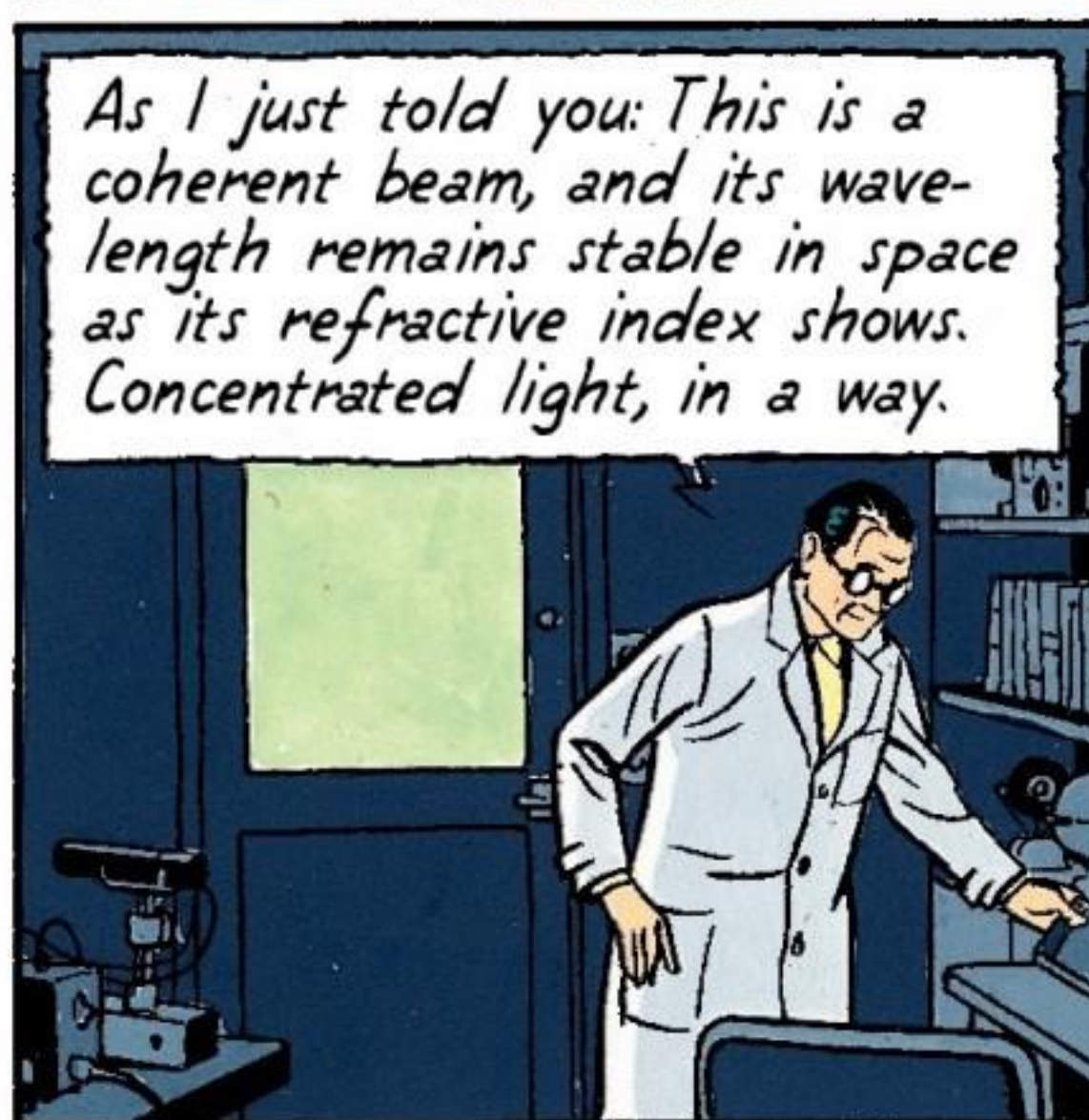
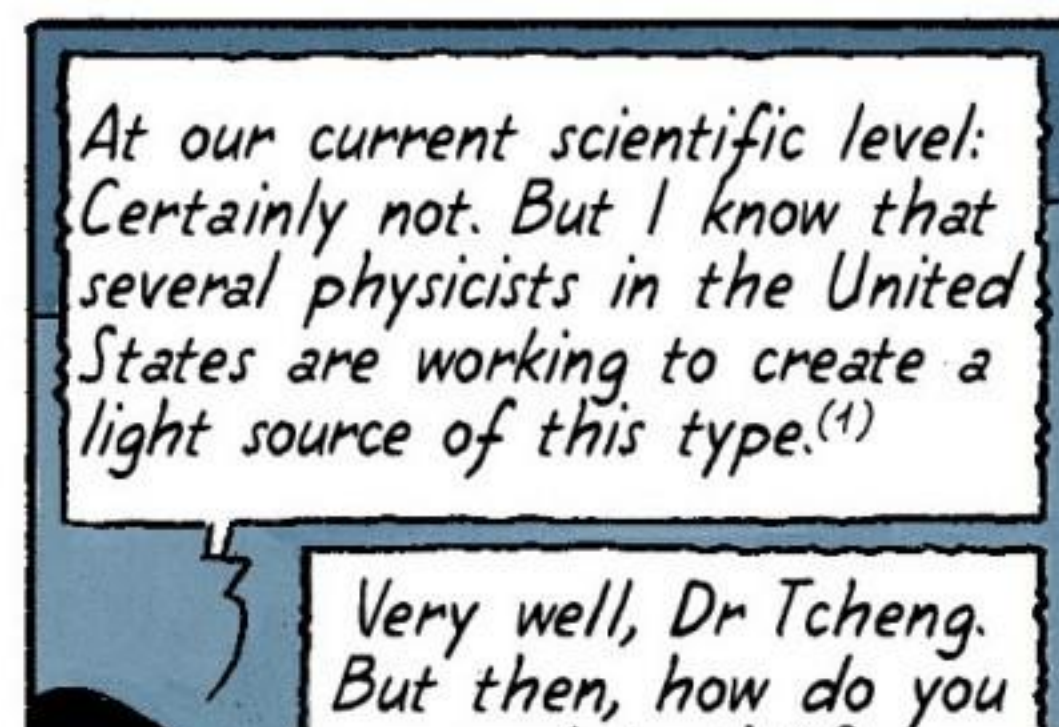
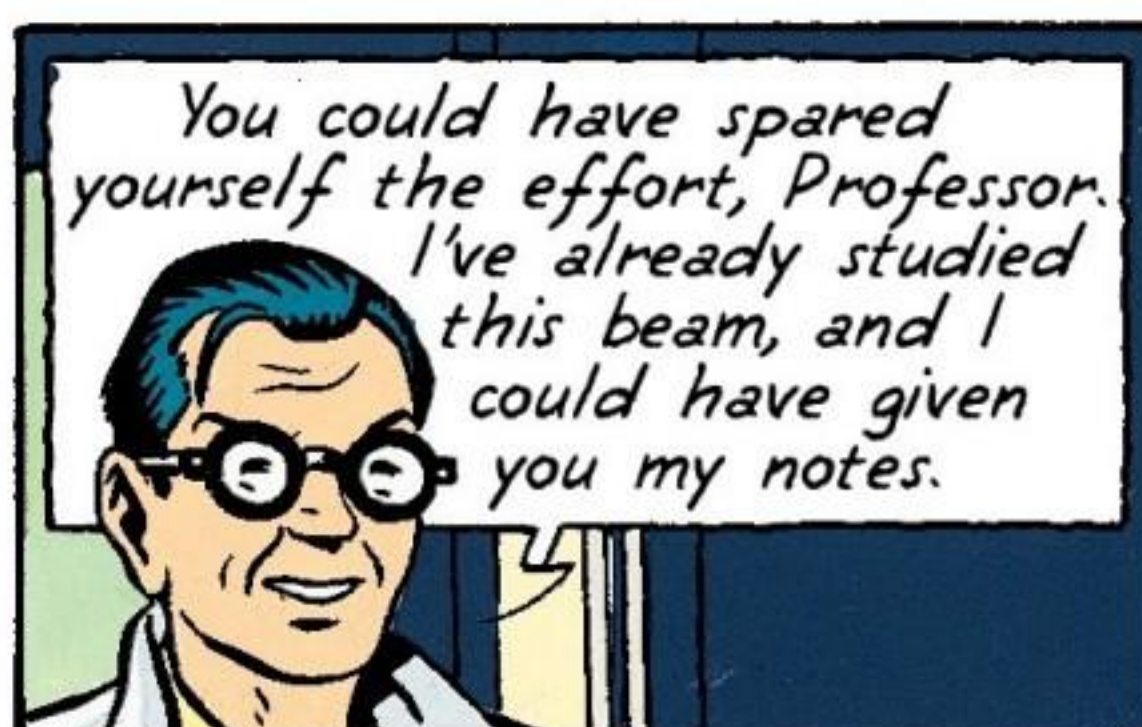
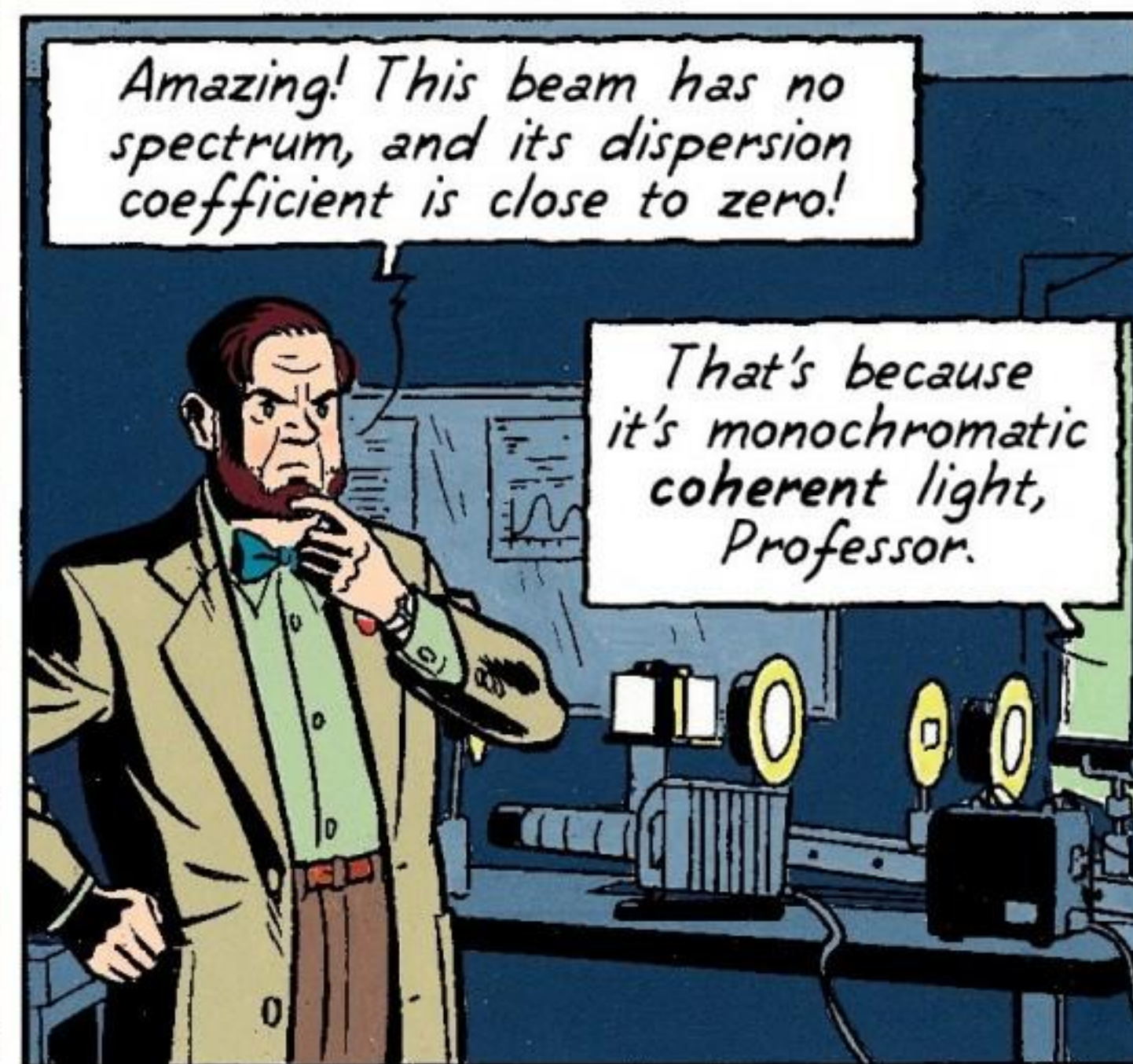
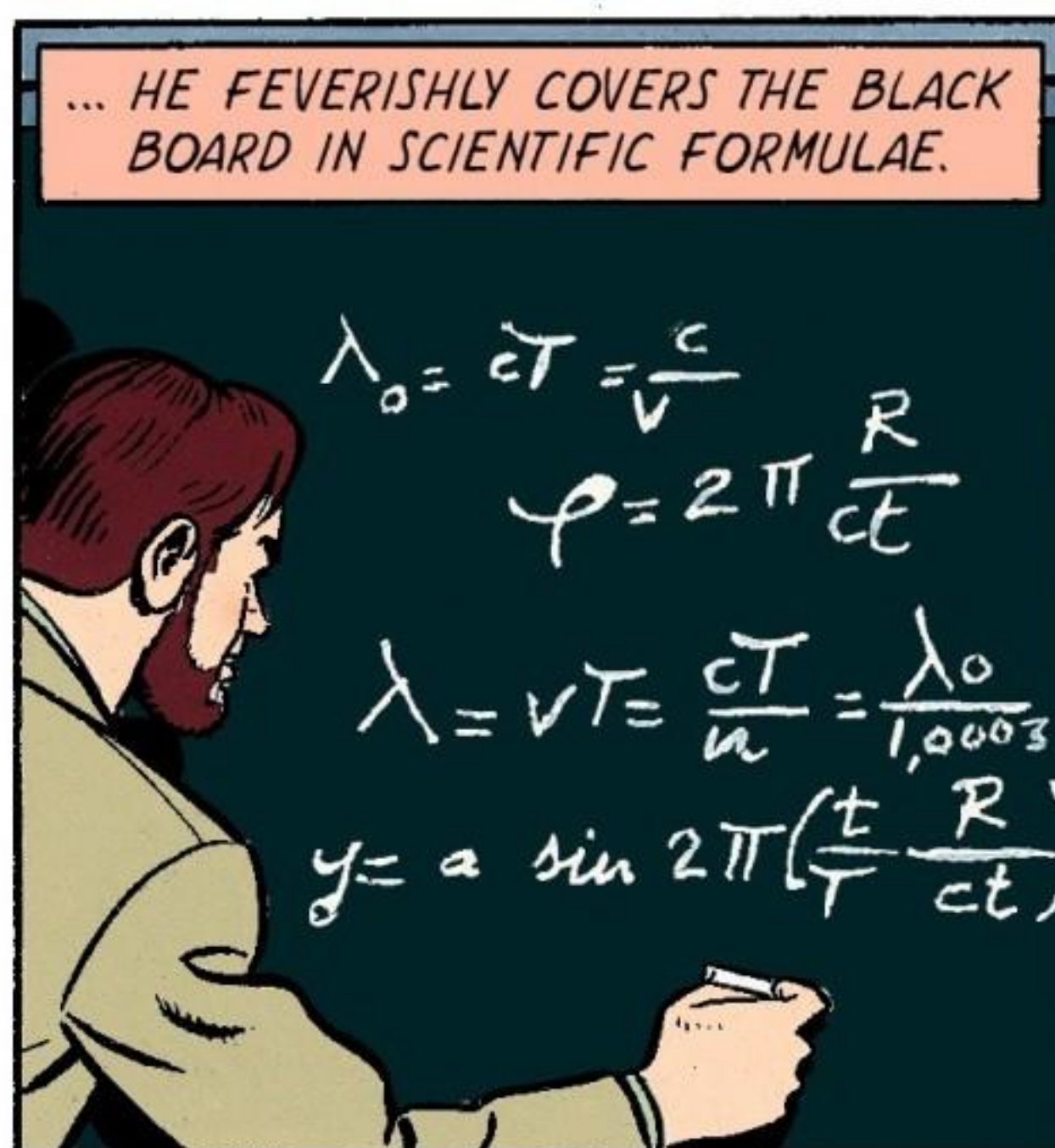
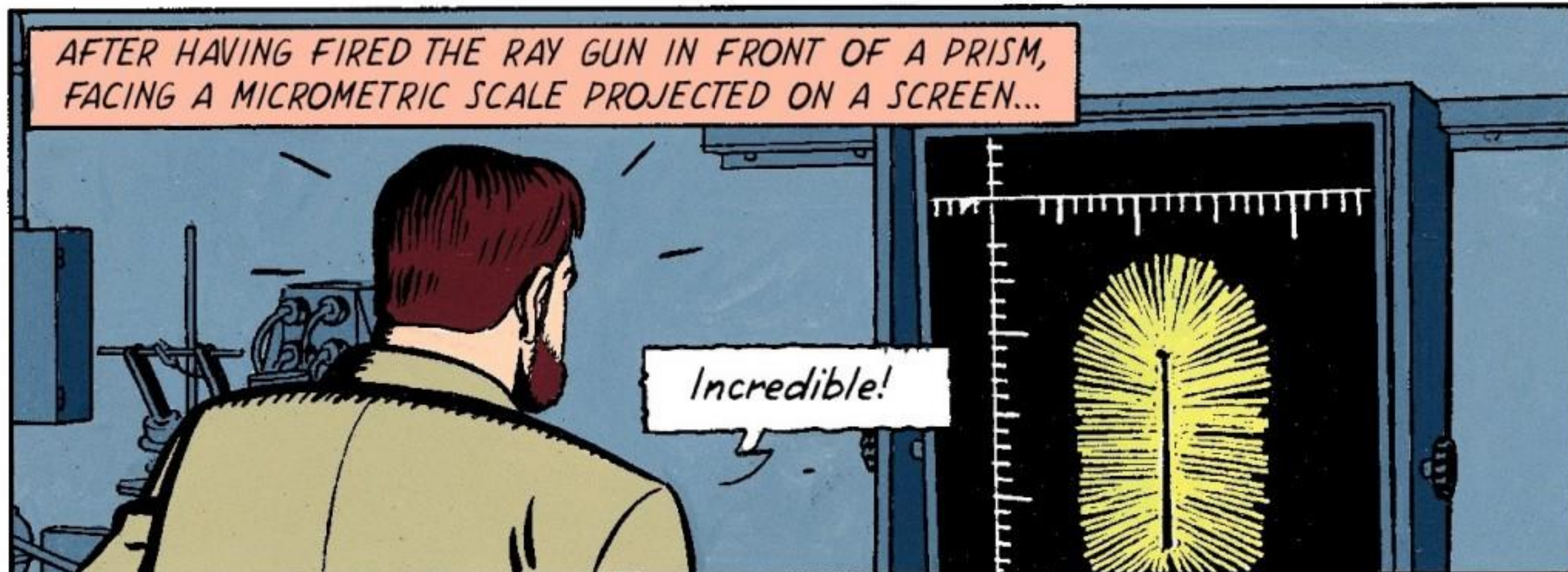
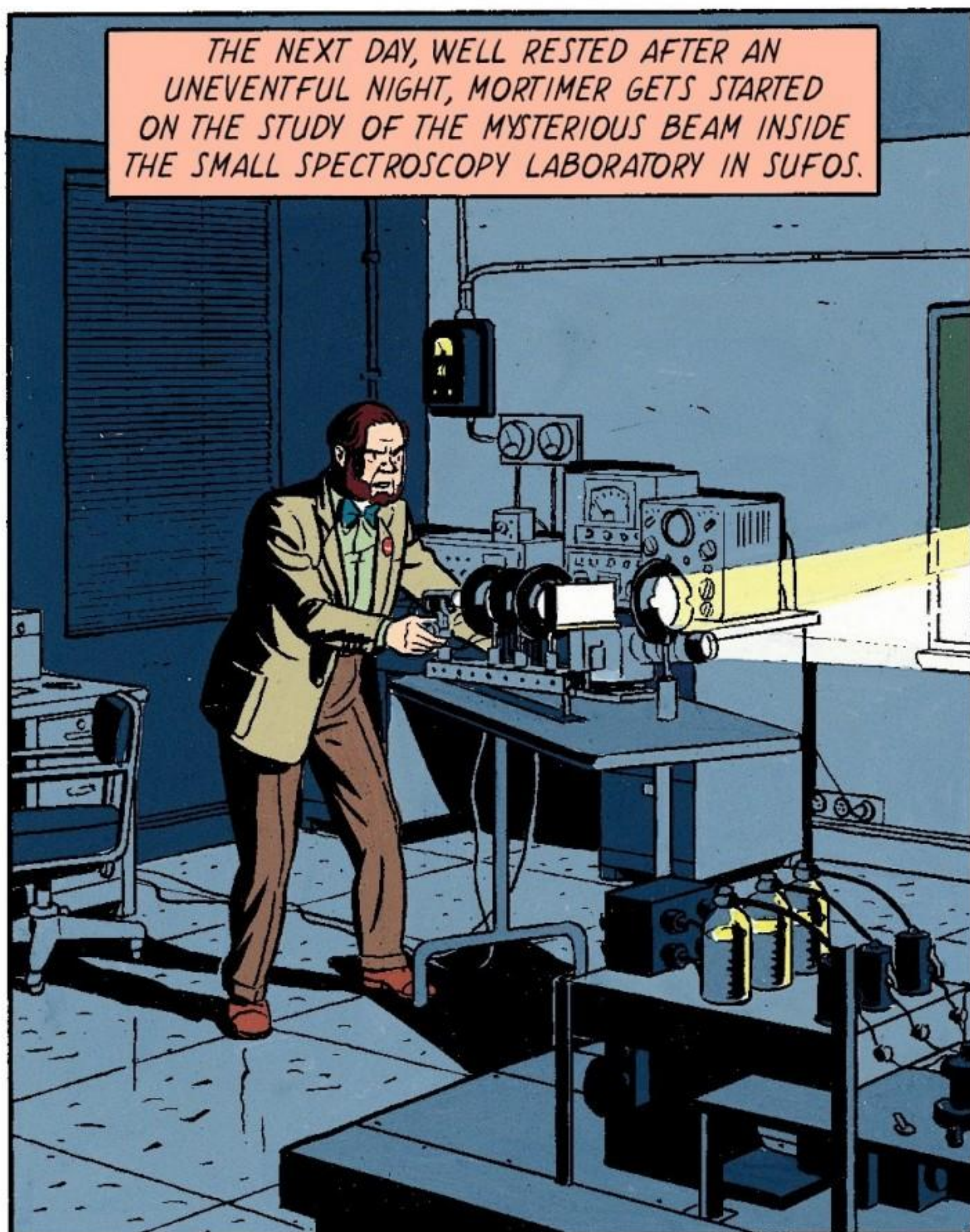
A FEW HOURS LATER, WHILE DR KAUFMAN IS BEING TAKEN TO TOPEKA'S AIRPORT BY HIS ASSISTANT, MORTIMER GOES DOWN TO THE UNDERGROUND ROOM WHERE THE BODY OF LACHLAN MACQUARRIE LIES.



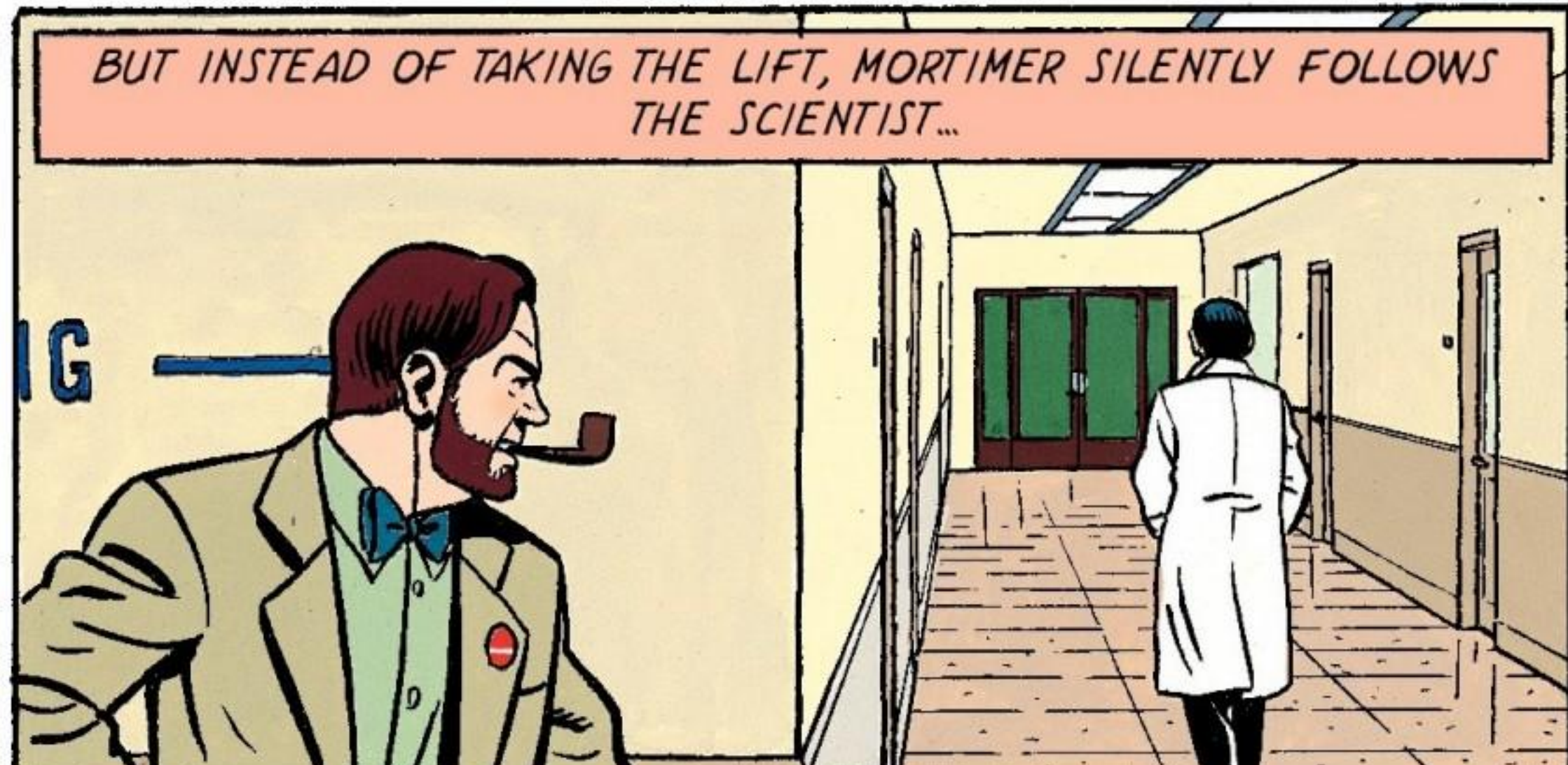
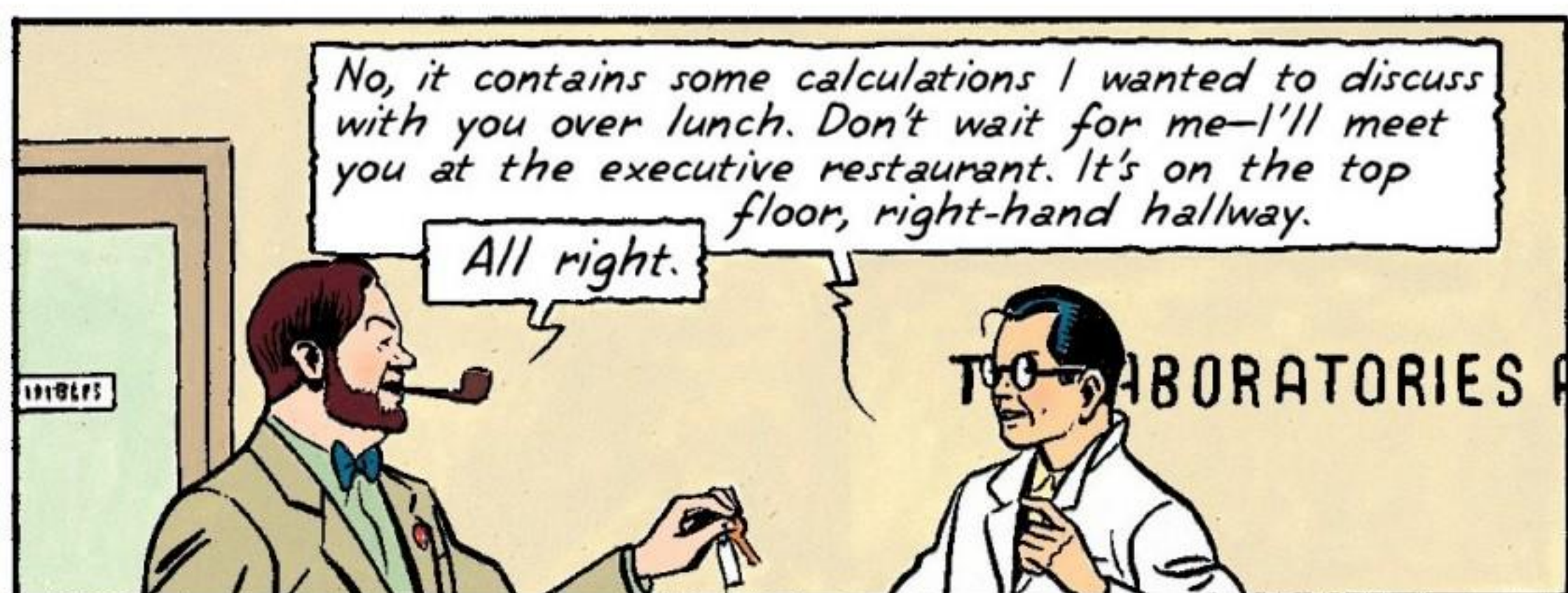
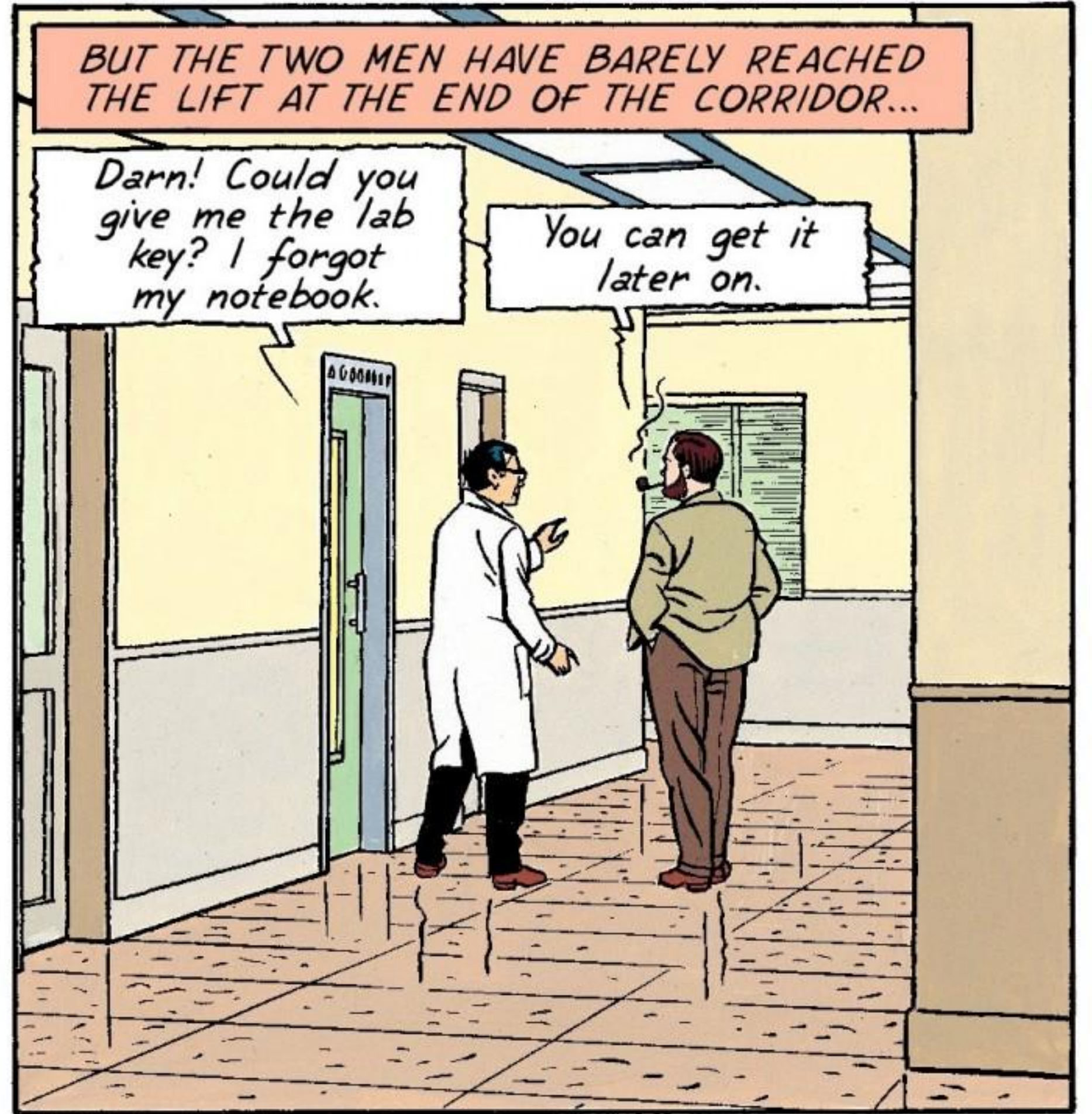
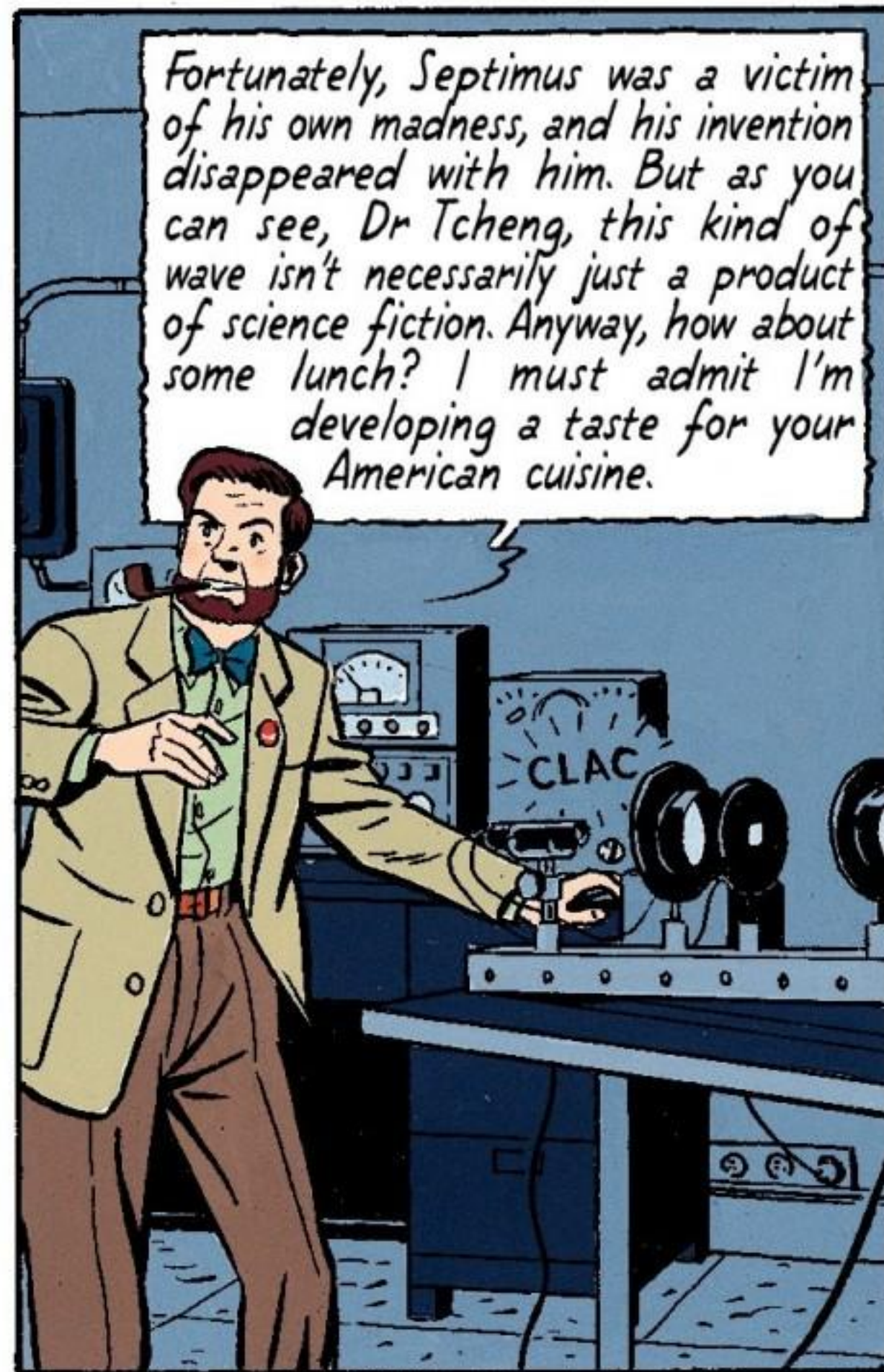
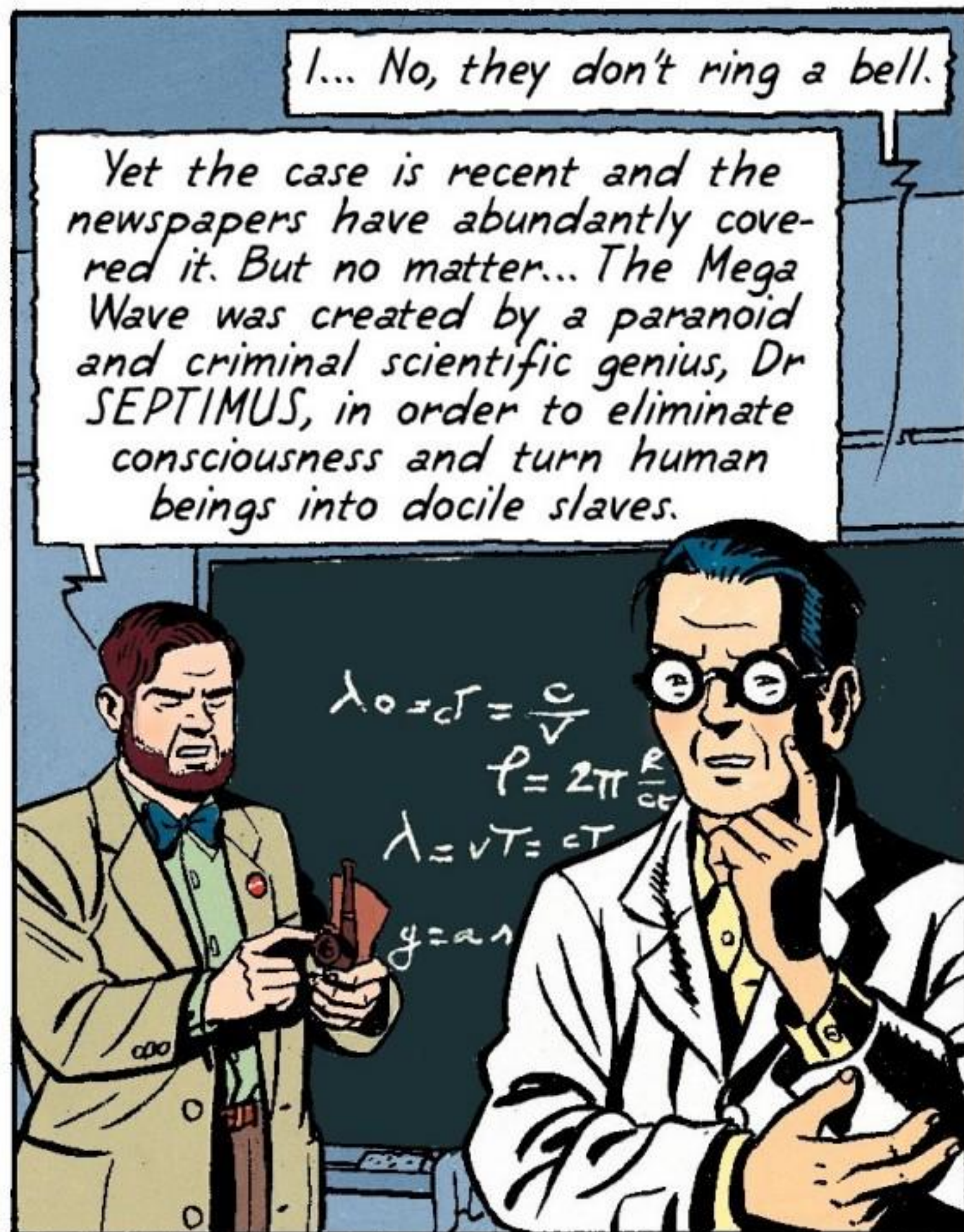
MORE MOVED THAN HE'D CARE TO ADMIT TO HIMSELF AT FACING THIS 244-YEAR-OLD MAN WHOSE DIRECT DESCENDANT HE IS, OUR FRIEND ATTEMPTS TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY OF THIS STRANGE ENCOUNTER, SET IN MOTION OVER THE CENTURIES BY HIS OWN ANCESTOR.

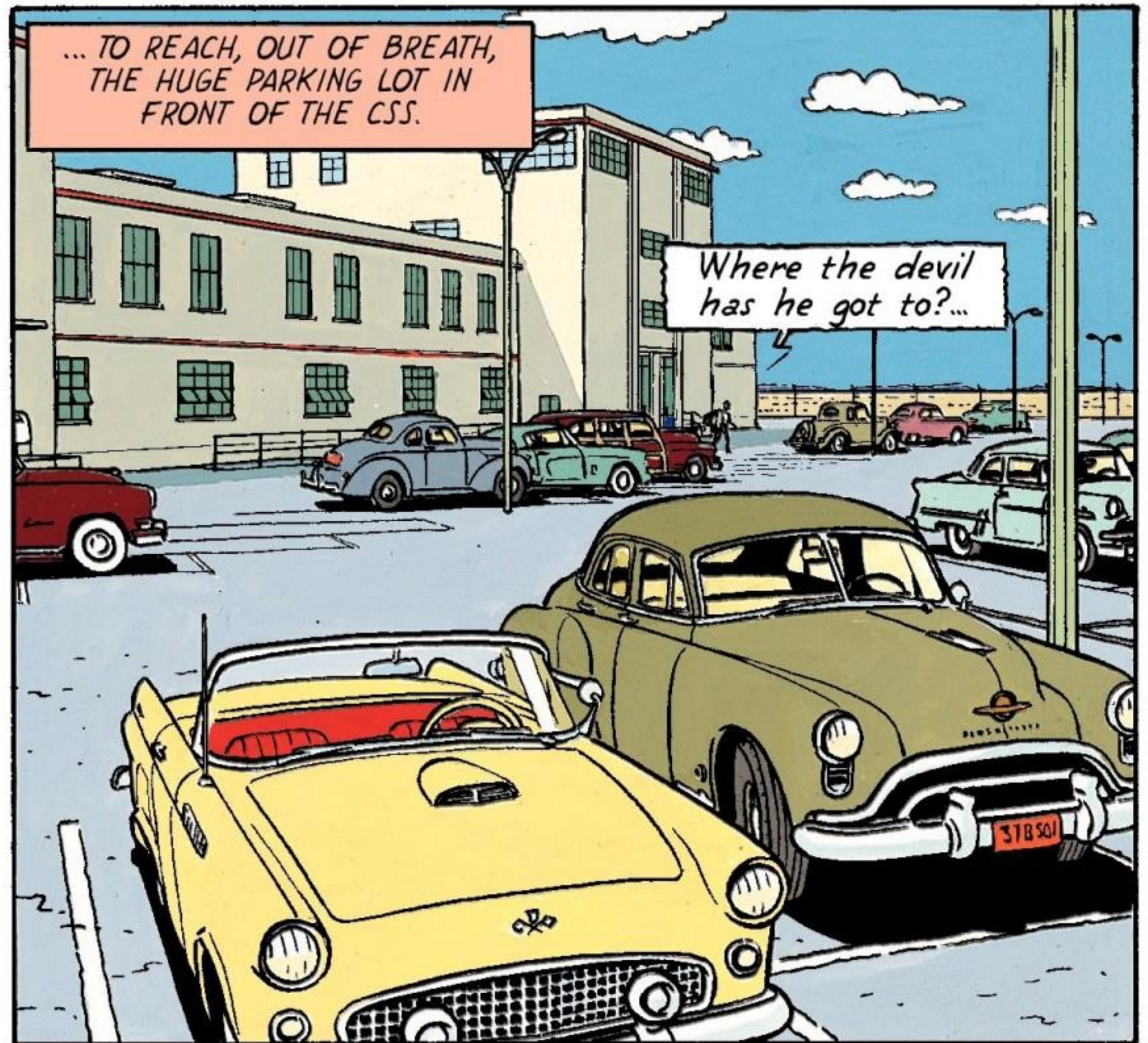
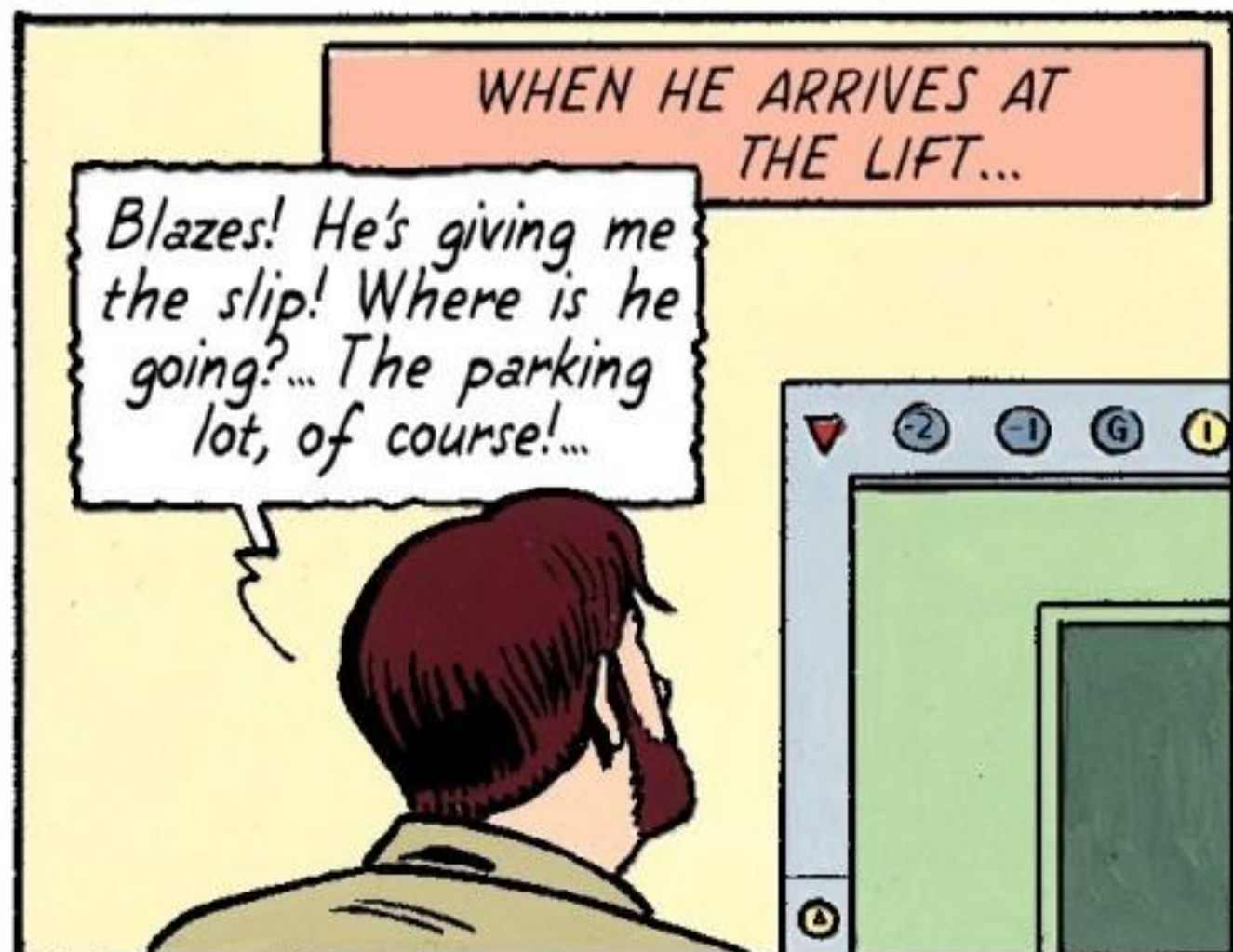
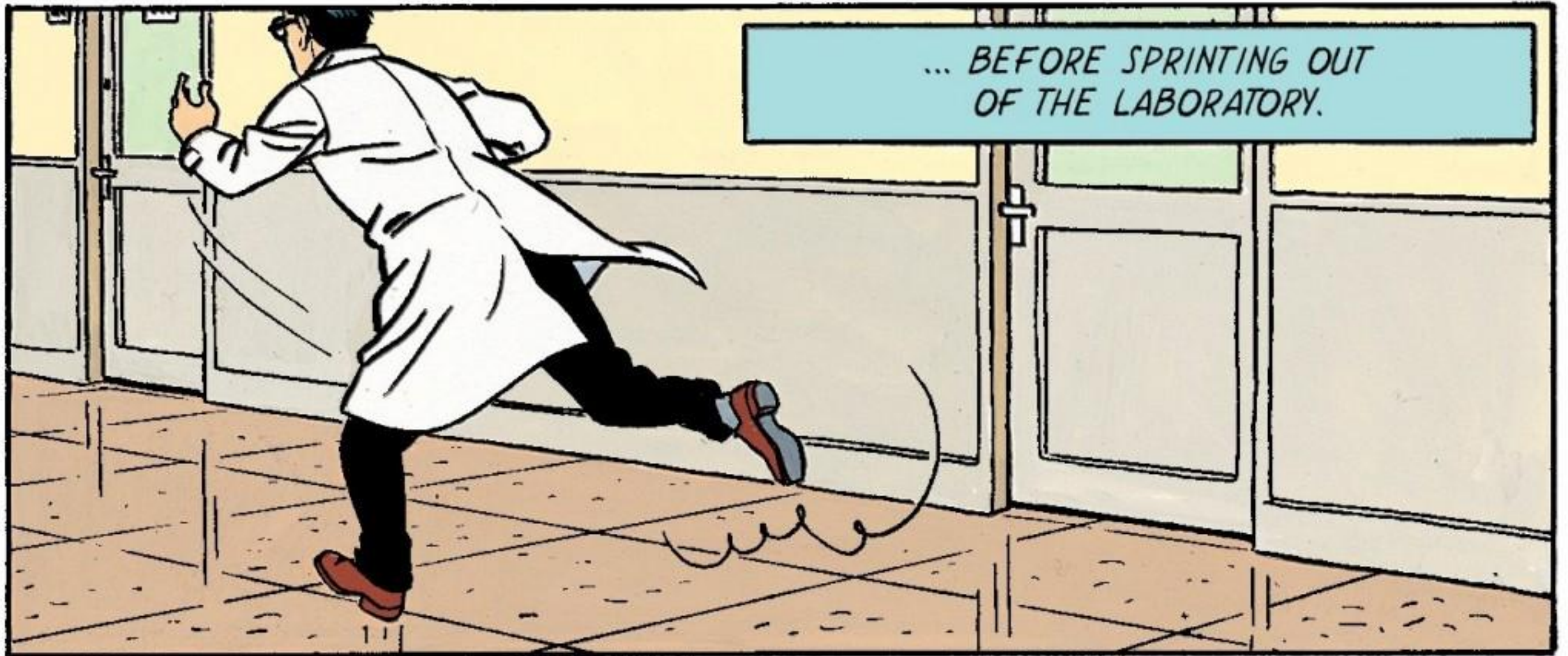
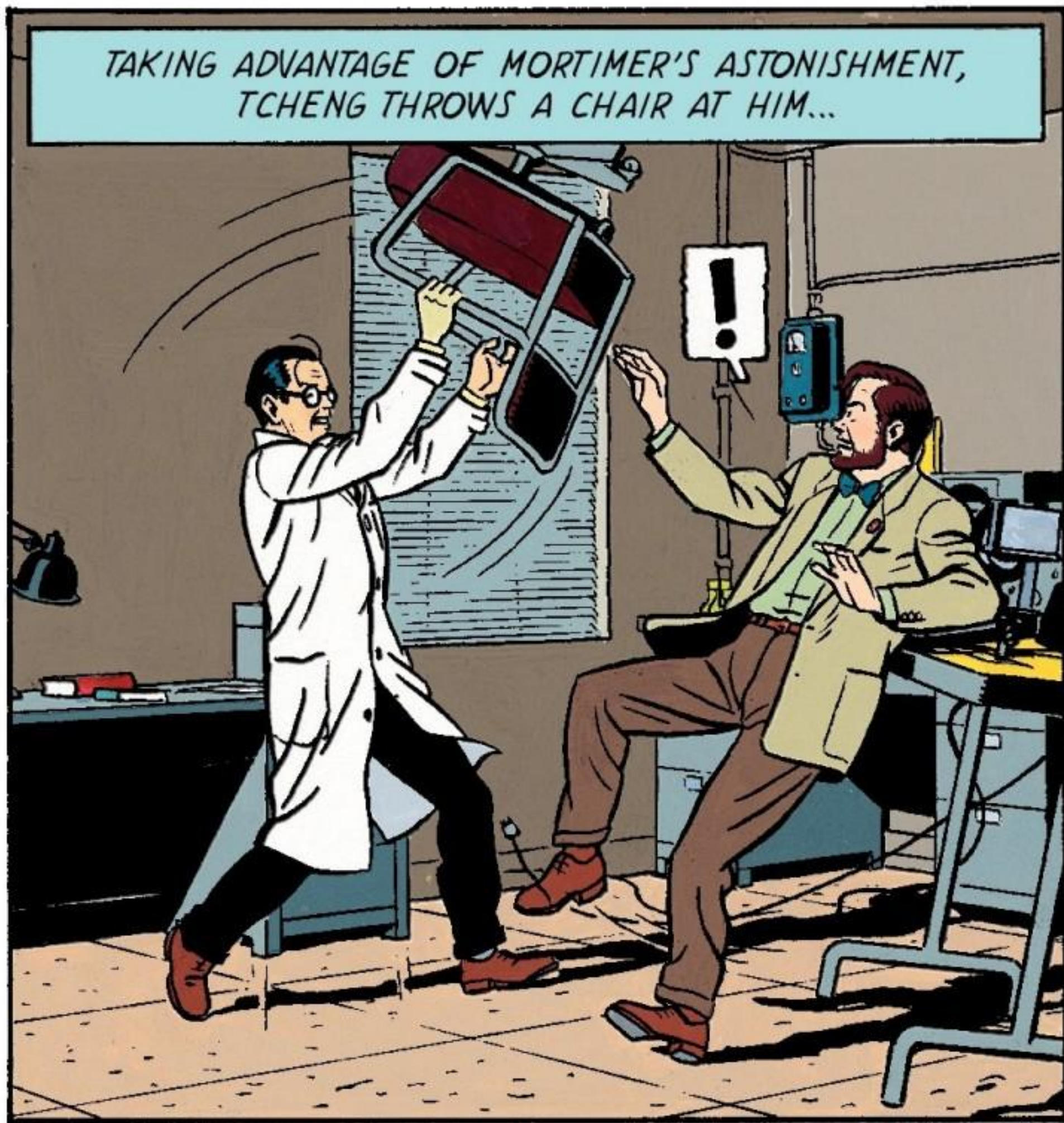
BUT THE FROZEN FACE OF THE FORMER MAJOR OF THE 62ND WILTSHIRE REGIMENT KEEPS ITS SECRET.

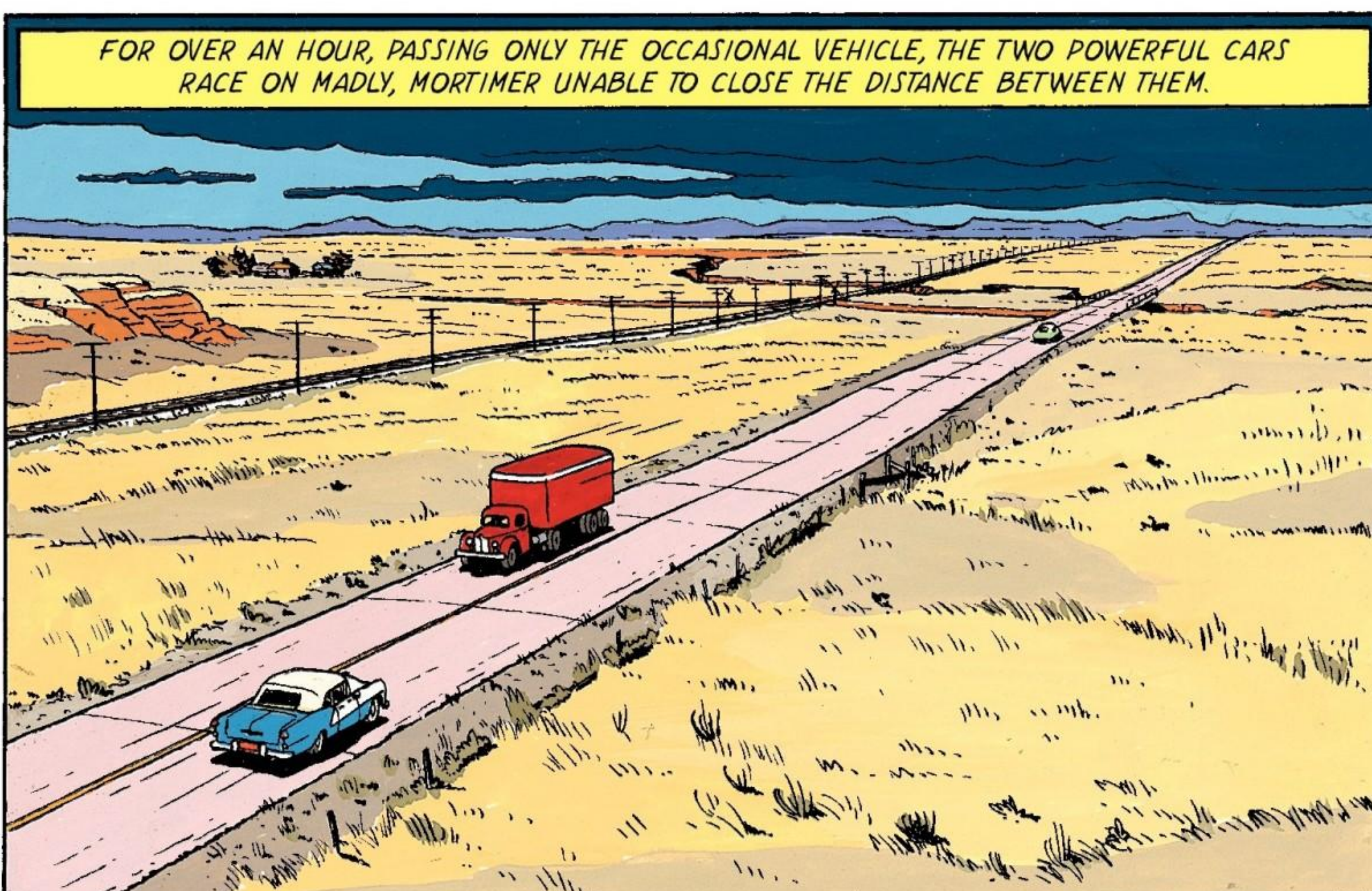
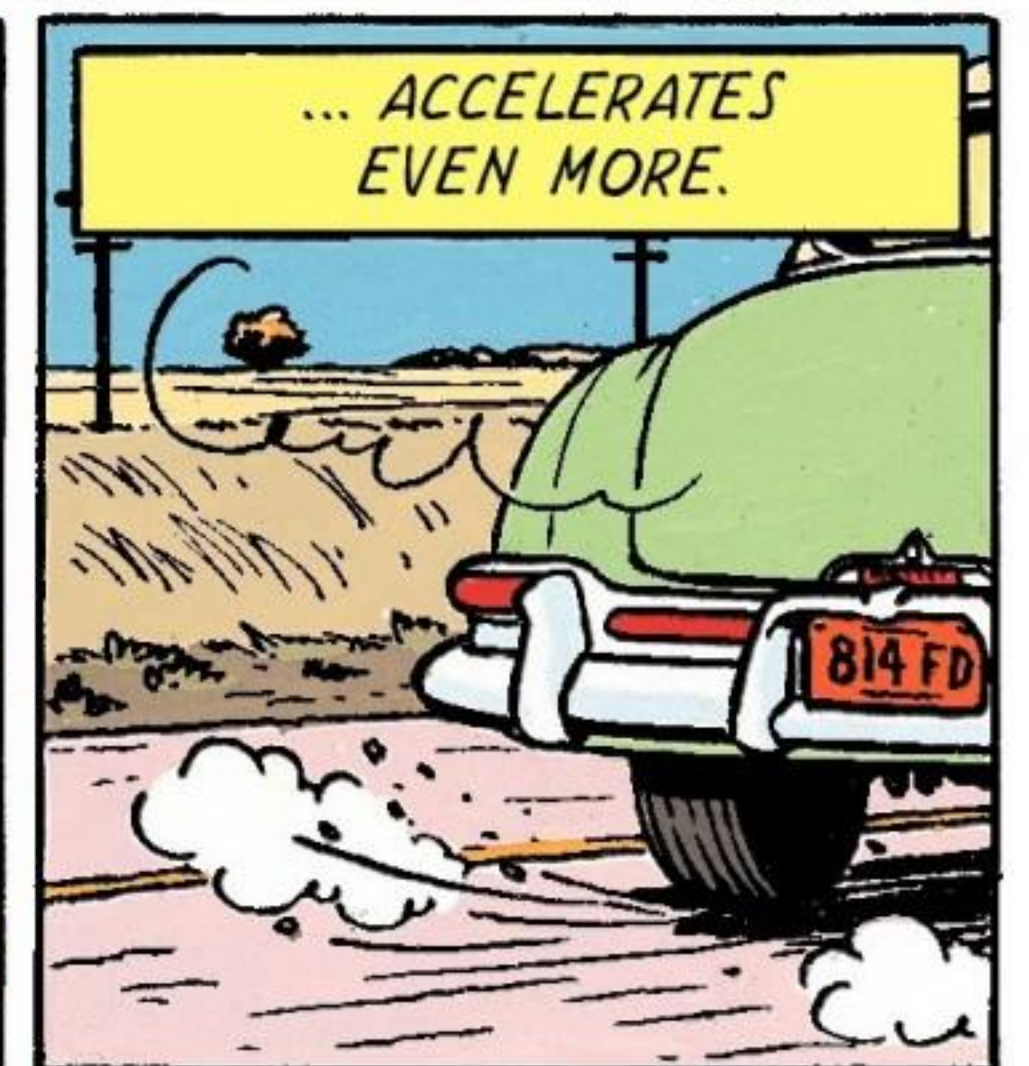
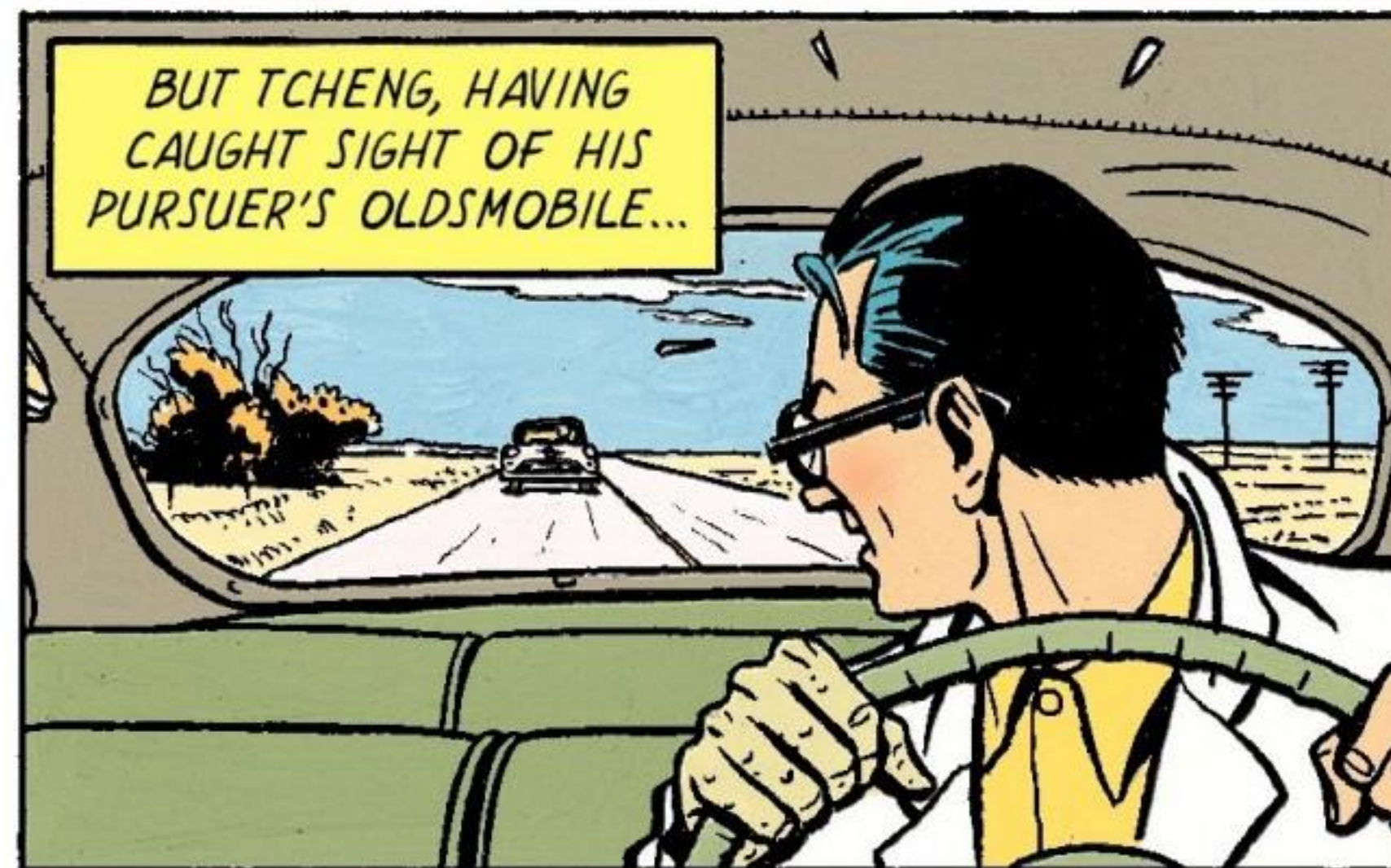
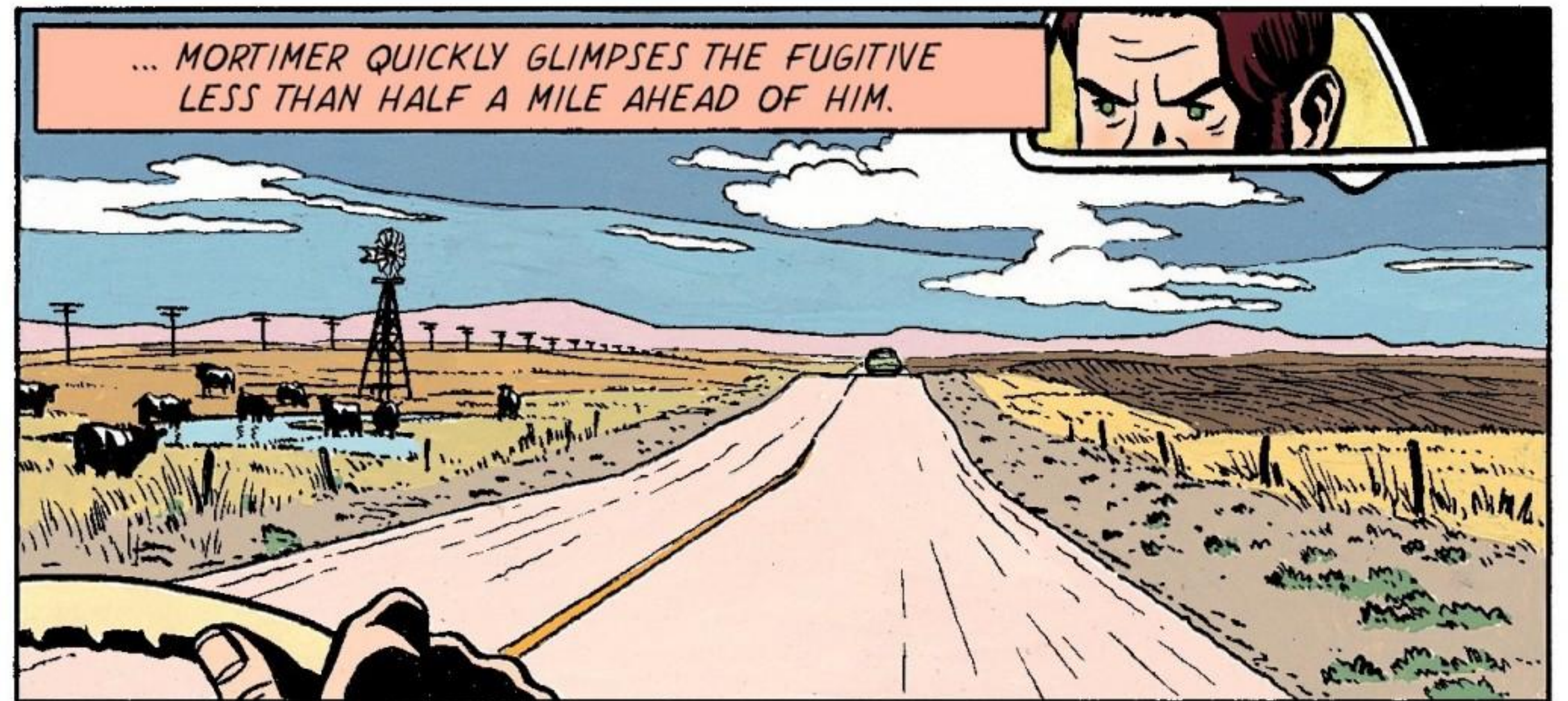
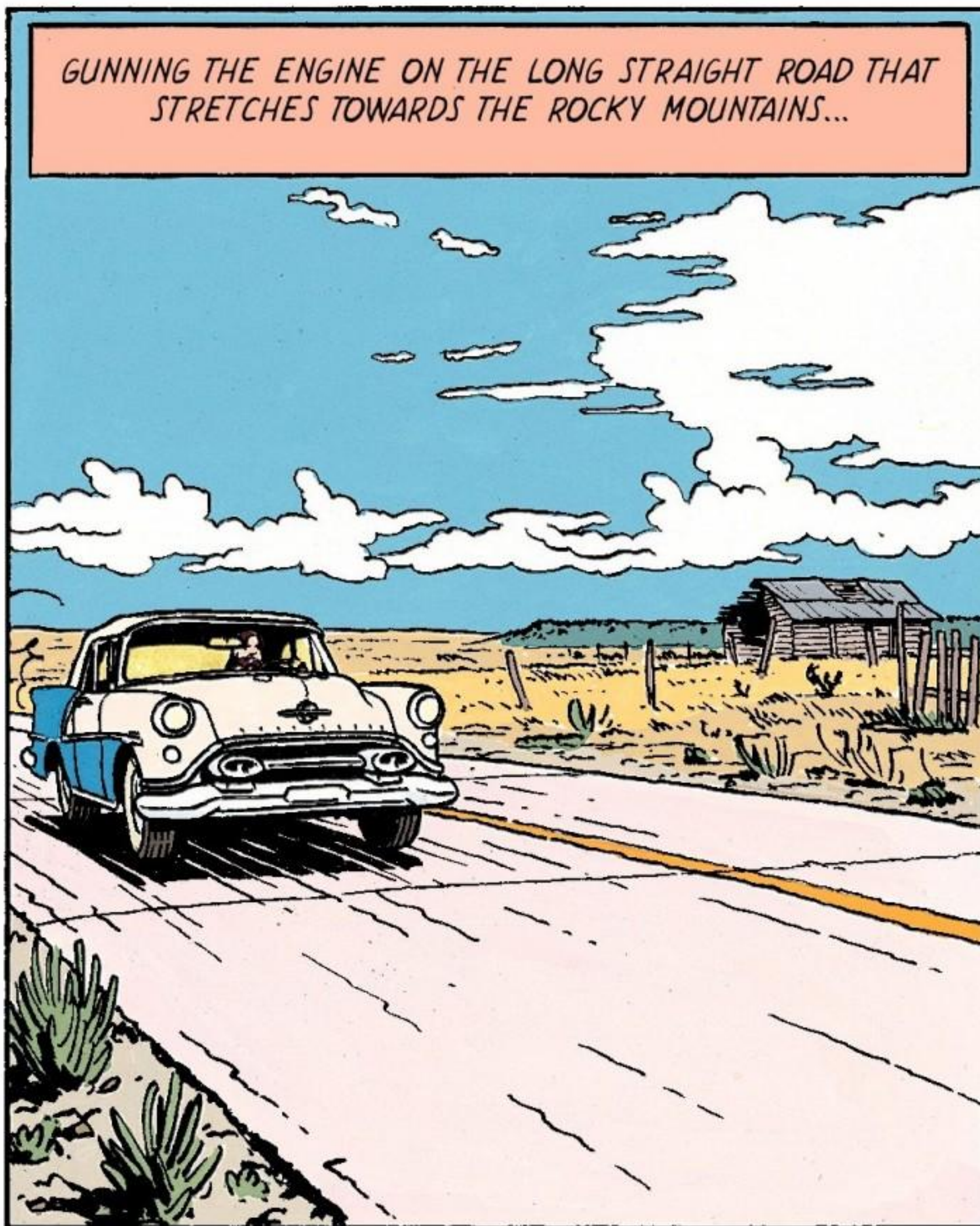
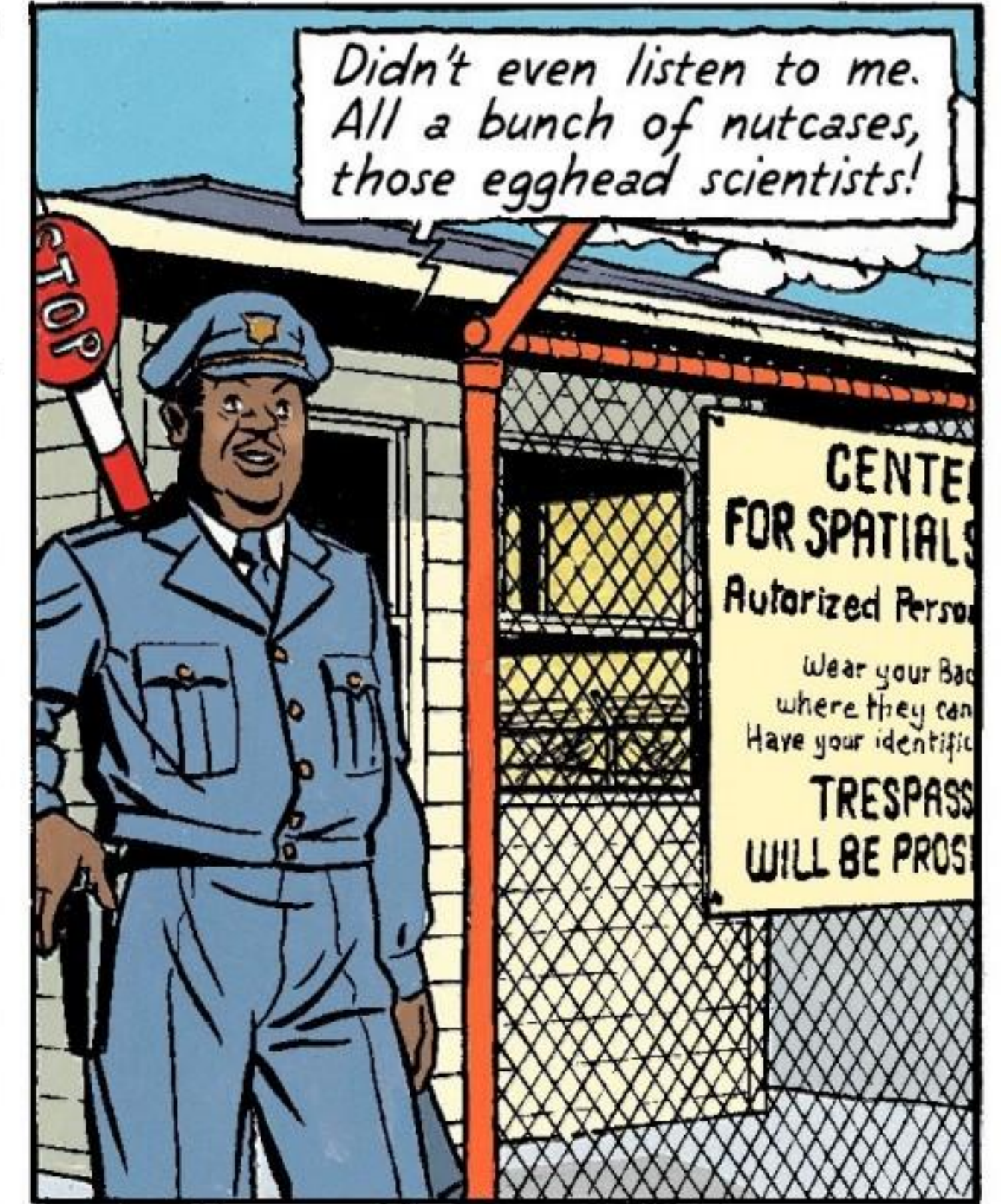
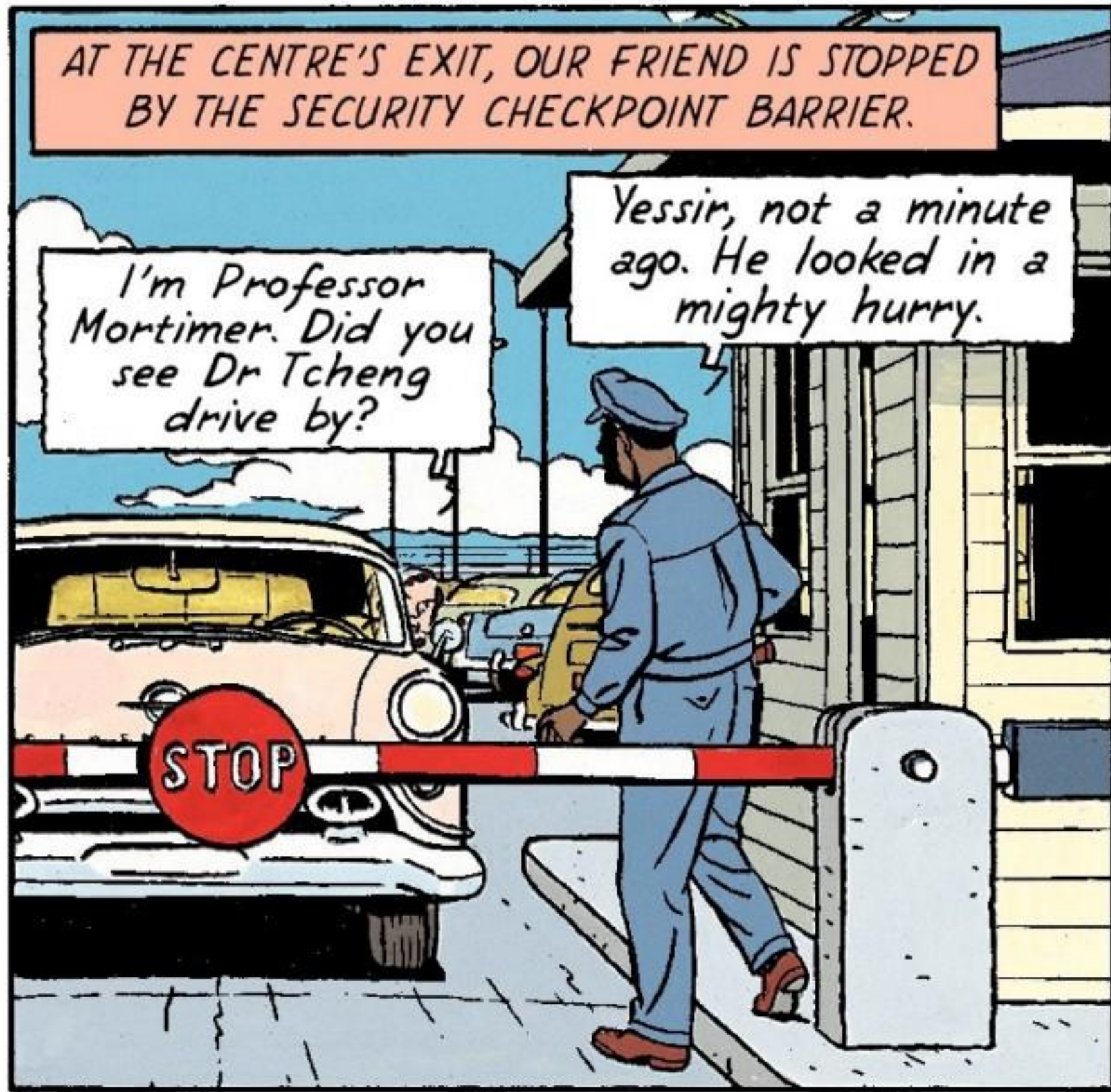


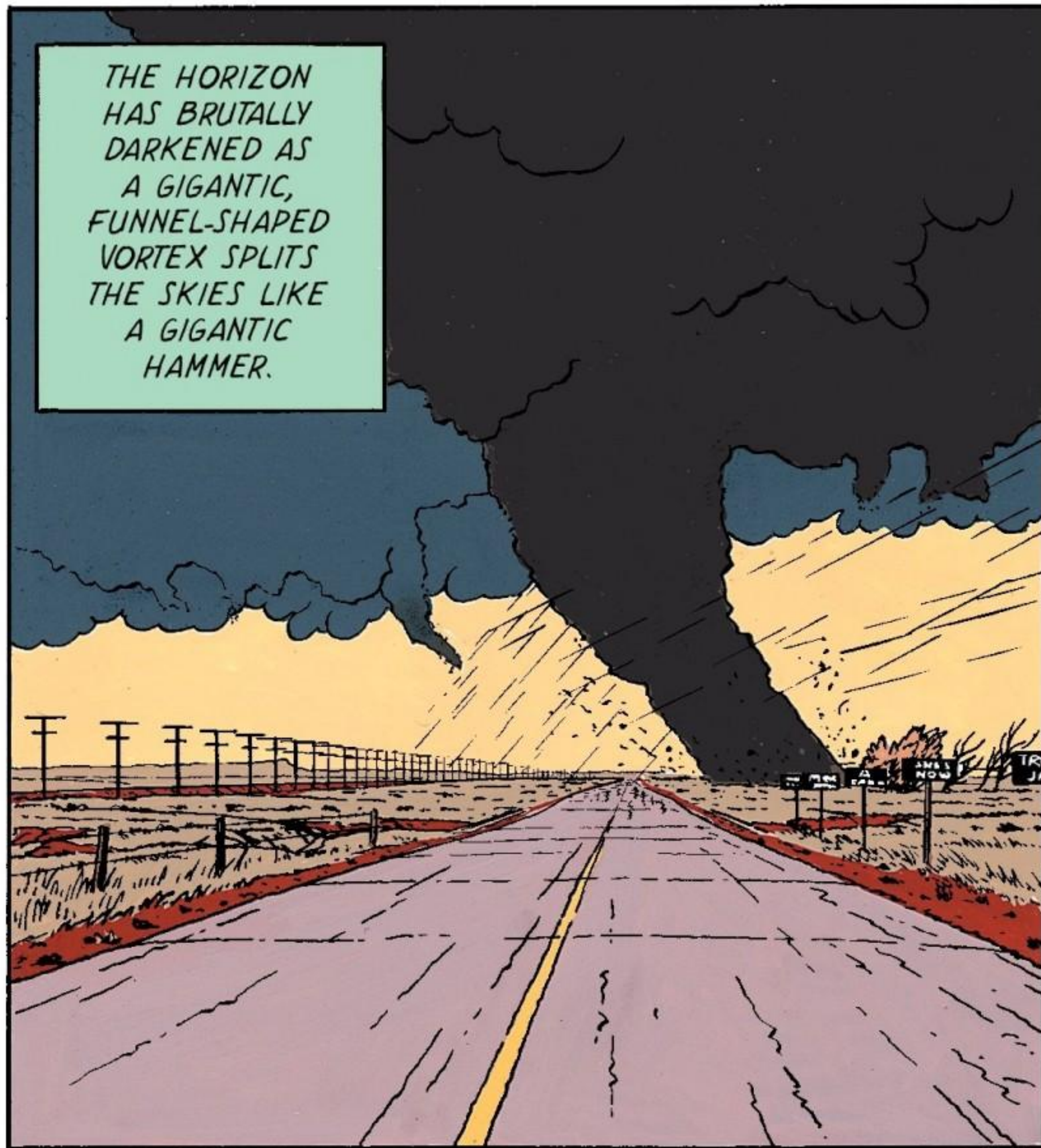


⁽¹⁾ Which will be perfected in 1958 by the Americans Gould, Townes and Schawlow, and will become known by the name LASER

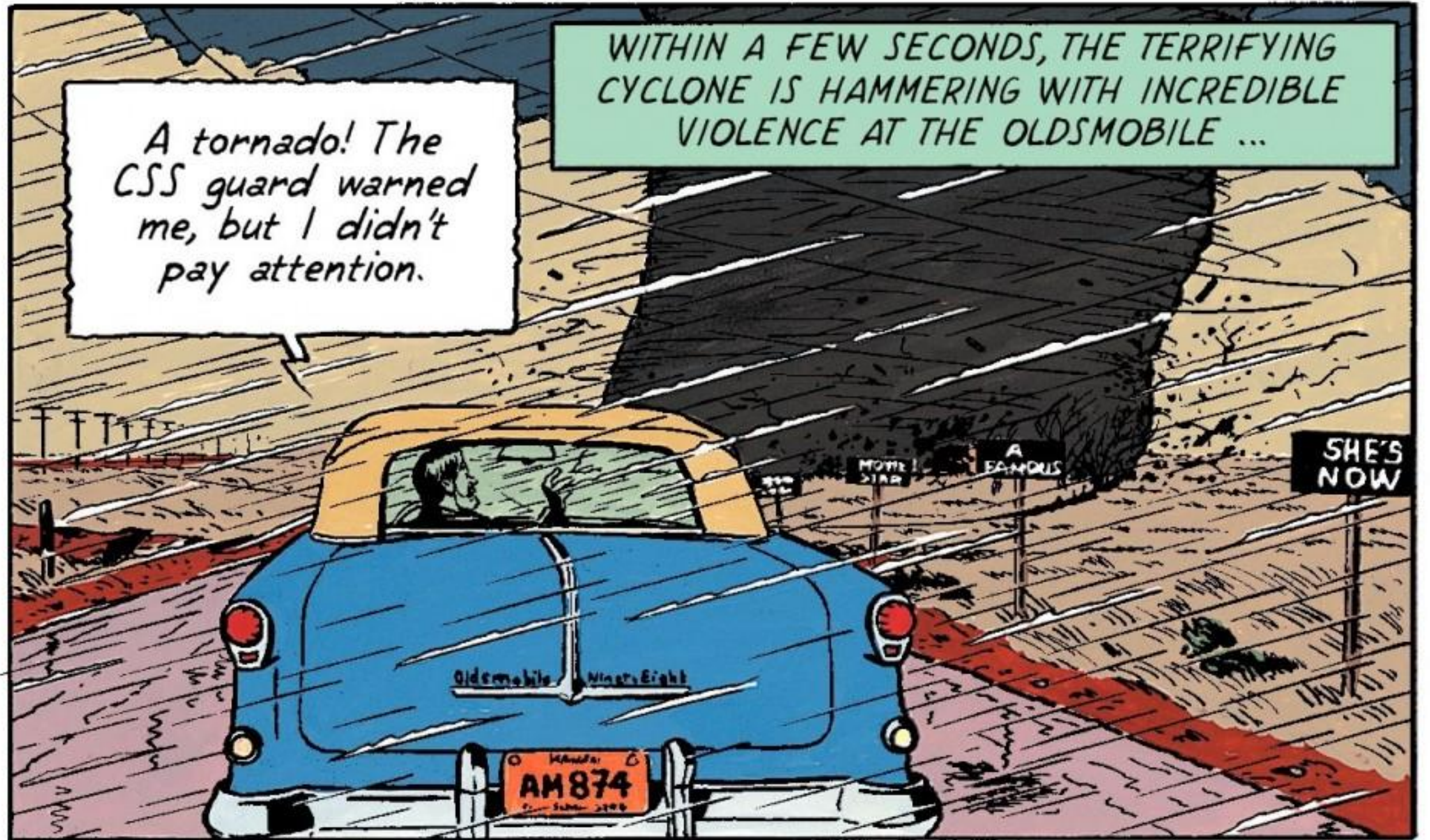








THE HORIZON HAS BRUTALLY DARKENED AS A GIGANTIC, FUNNEL-SHAPED VORTEX SPLITS THE SKIES LIKE A GIGANTIC HAMMER.

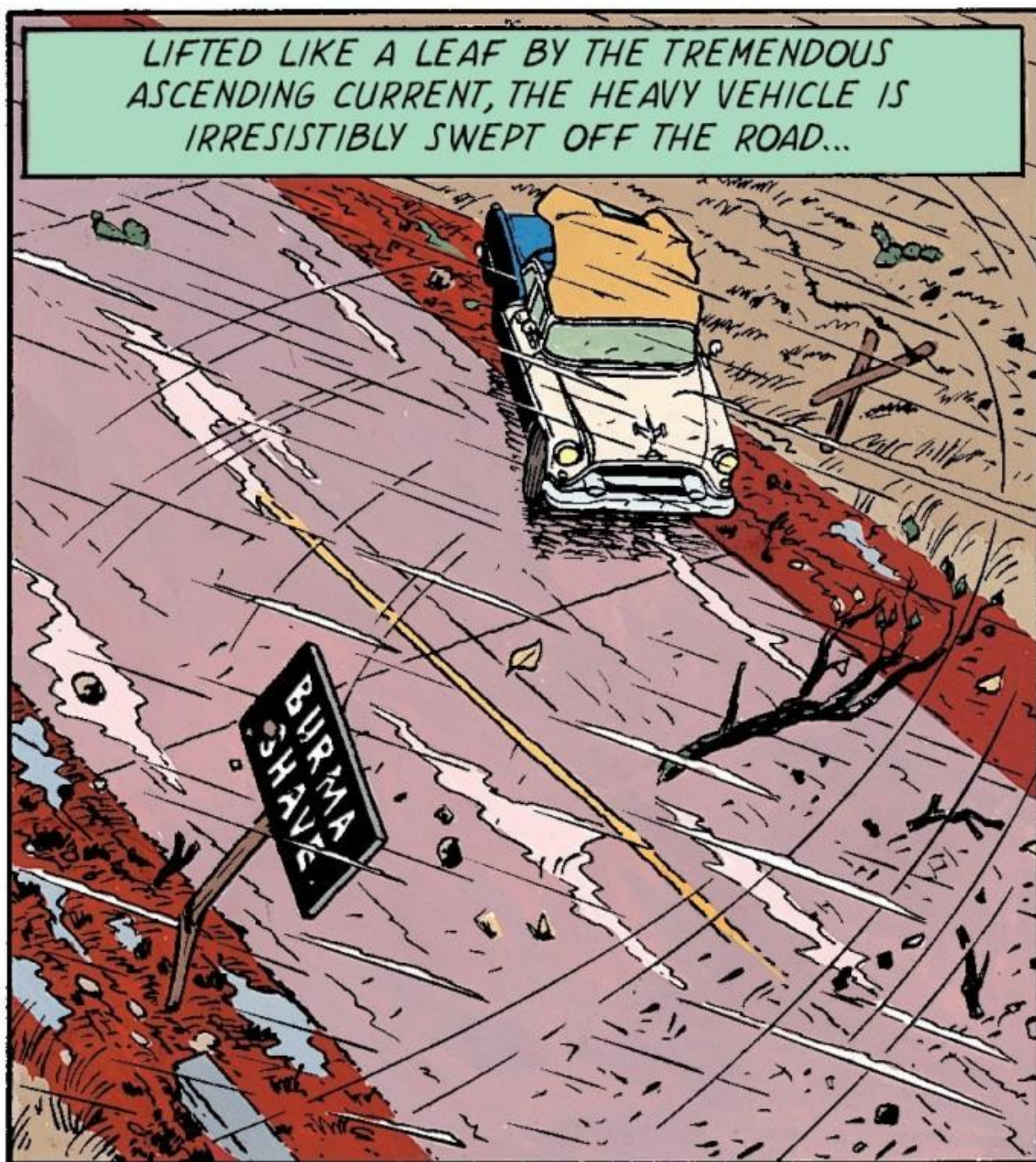


A tornado! The CSS guard warned me, but I didn't pay attention.

WITHIN A FEW SECONDS, THE TERRIFYING CYCLONE IS HAMMERING WITH INCREDIBLE VIOLENCE AT THE OLDSMOBILE ...



... WHICH MORTIMER HAS STOPPED, SHUTTING DOWN THE ENGINE.



LIFTED LIKE A LEAF BY THE TREMENDOUS ASCENDING CURRENT, THE HEAVY VEHICLE IS IRRESISTIBLY SWEEPED OFF THE ROAD...



... AND OVER THE EDGE OF A DRAINAGE DITCH, WHICH THE DOWNPOUR HAS SUDDENLY TURNED INTO A RAGING TORRENT.



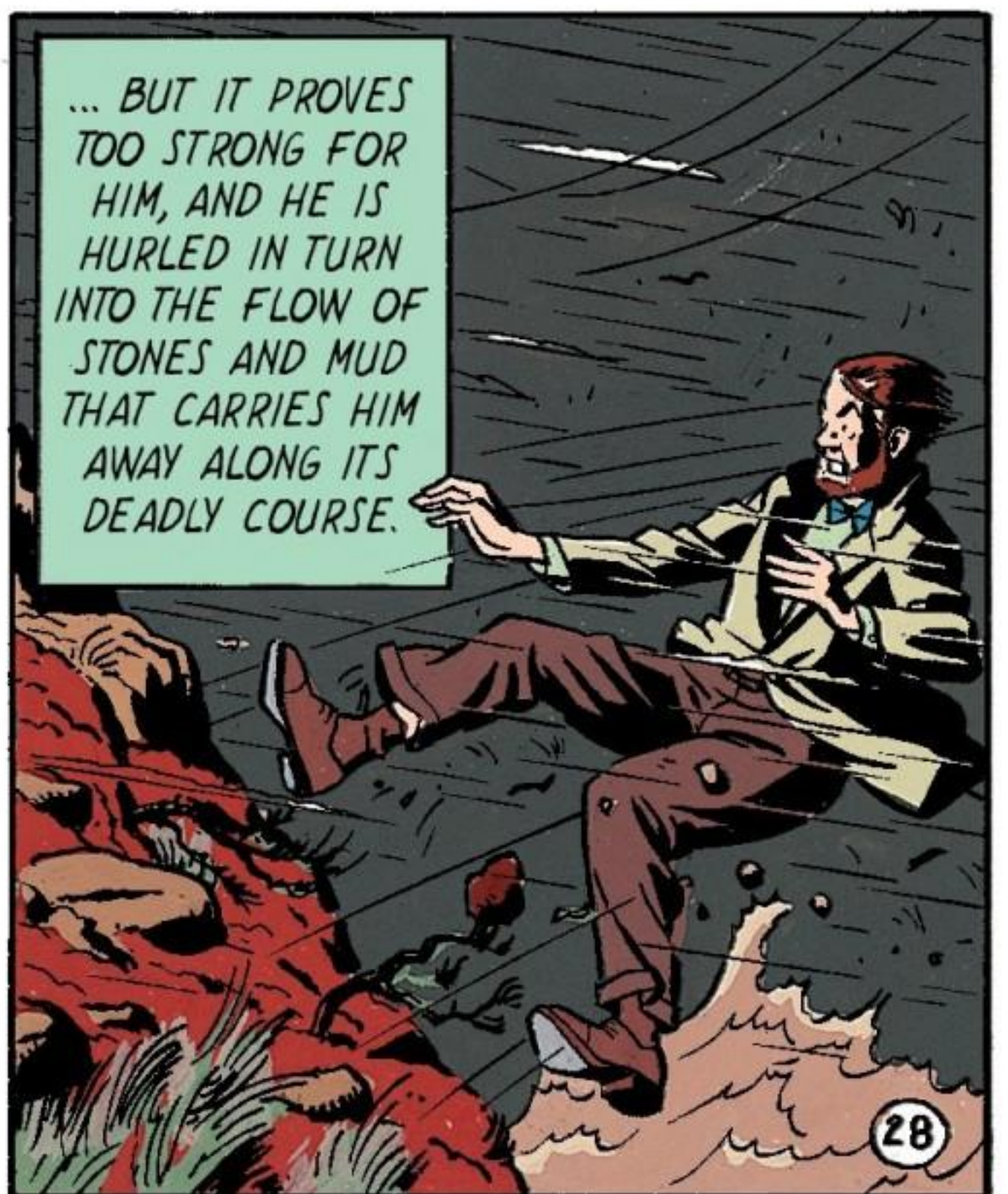
WITH A DESPERATE EFFORT, OUR FRIEND MANAGES TO OPEN THE DOOR A CRACK...



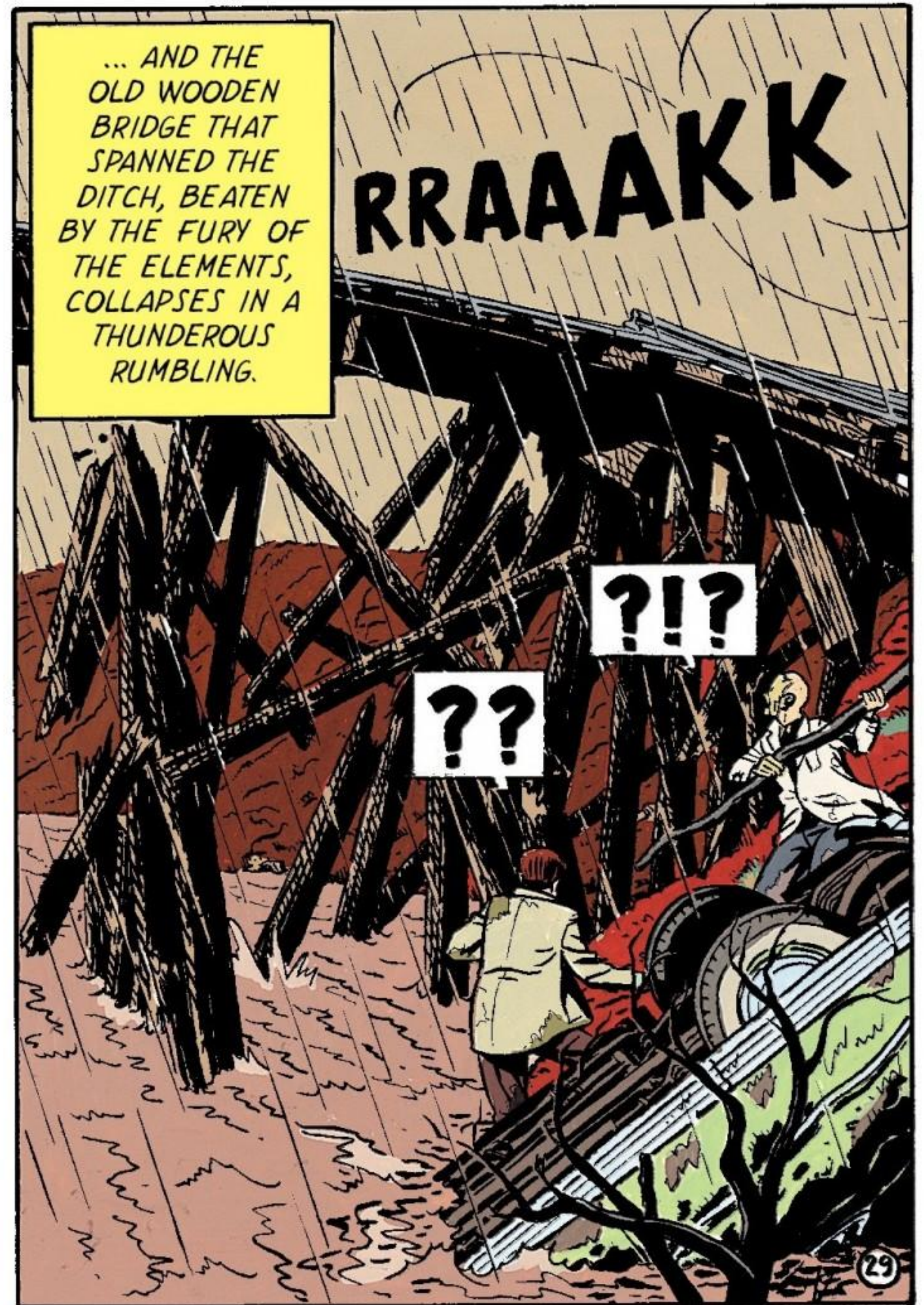
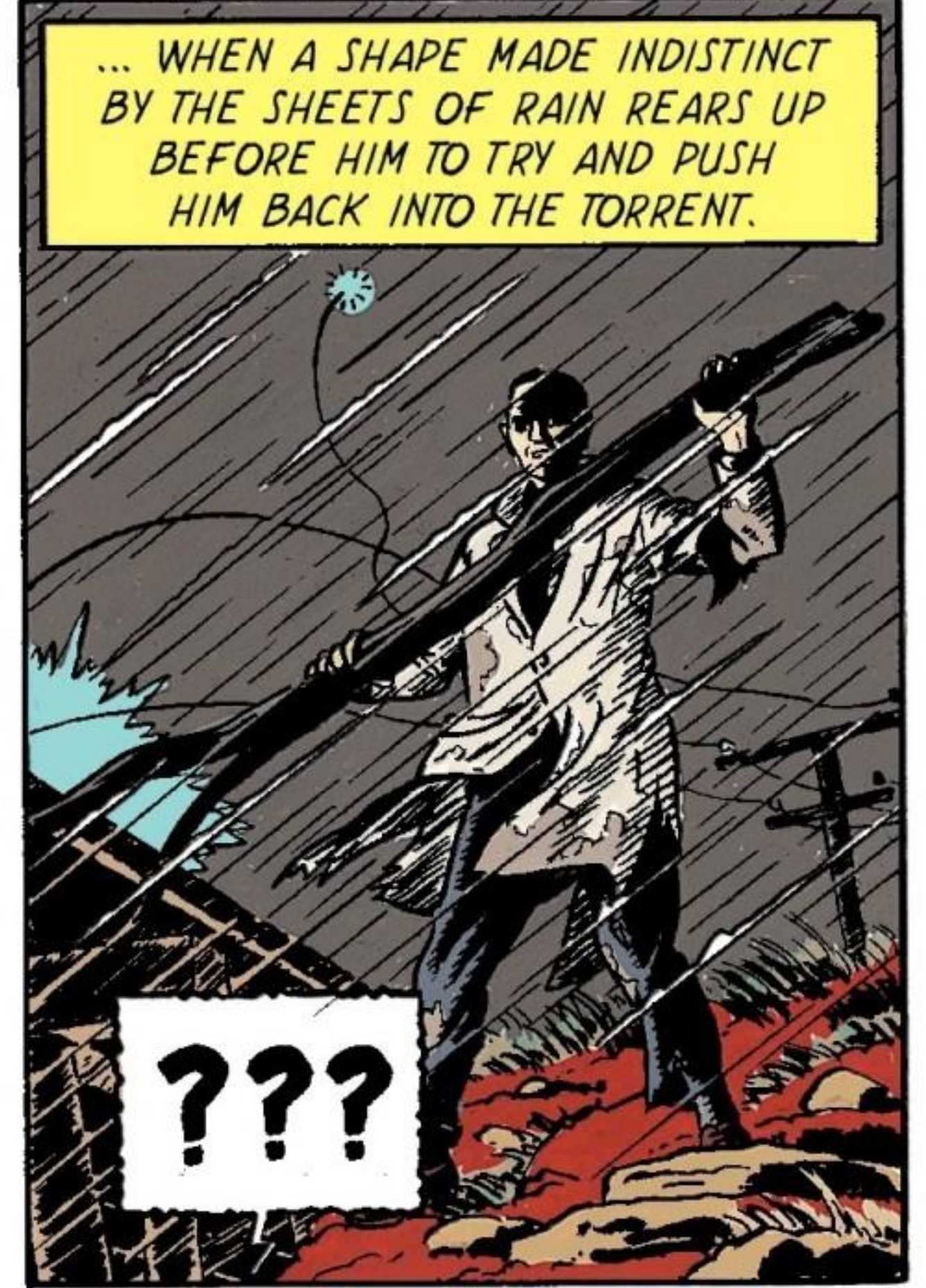
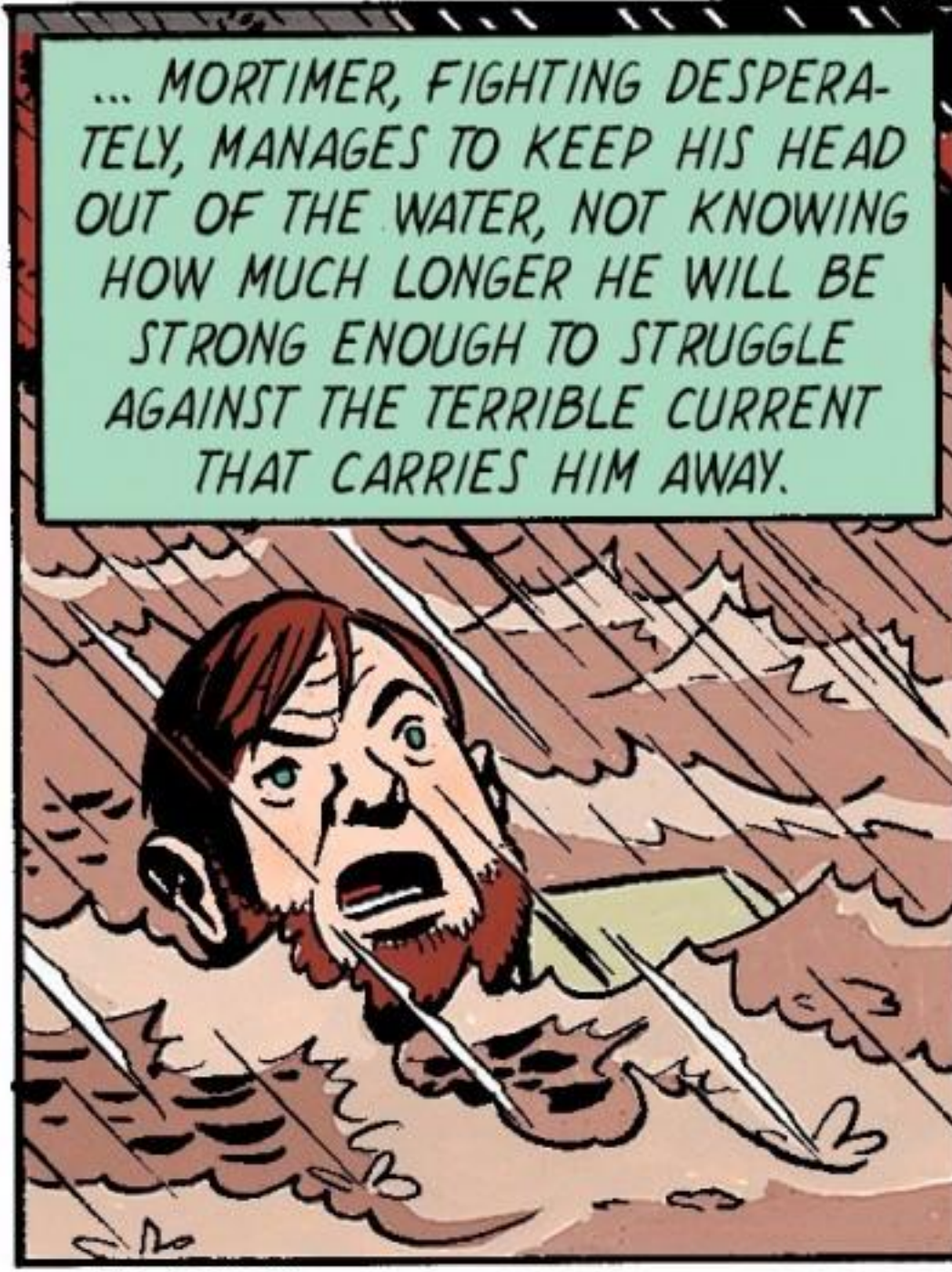
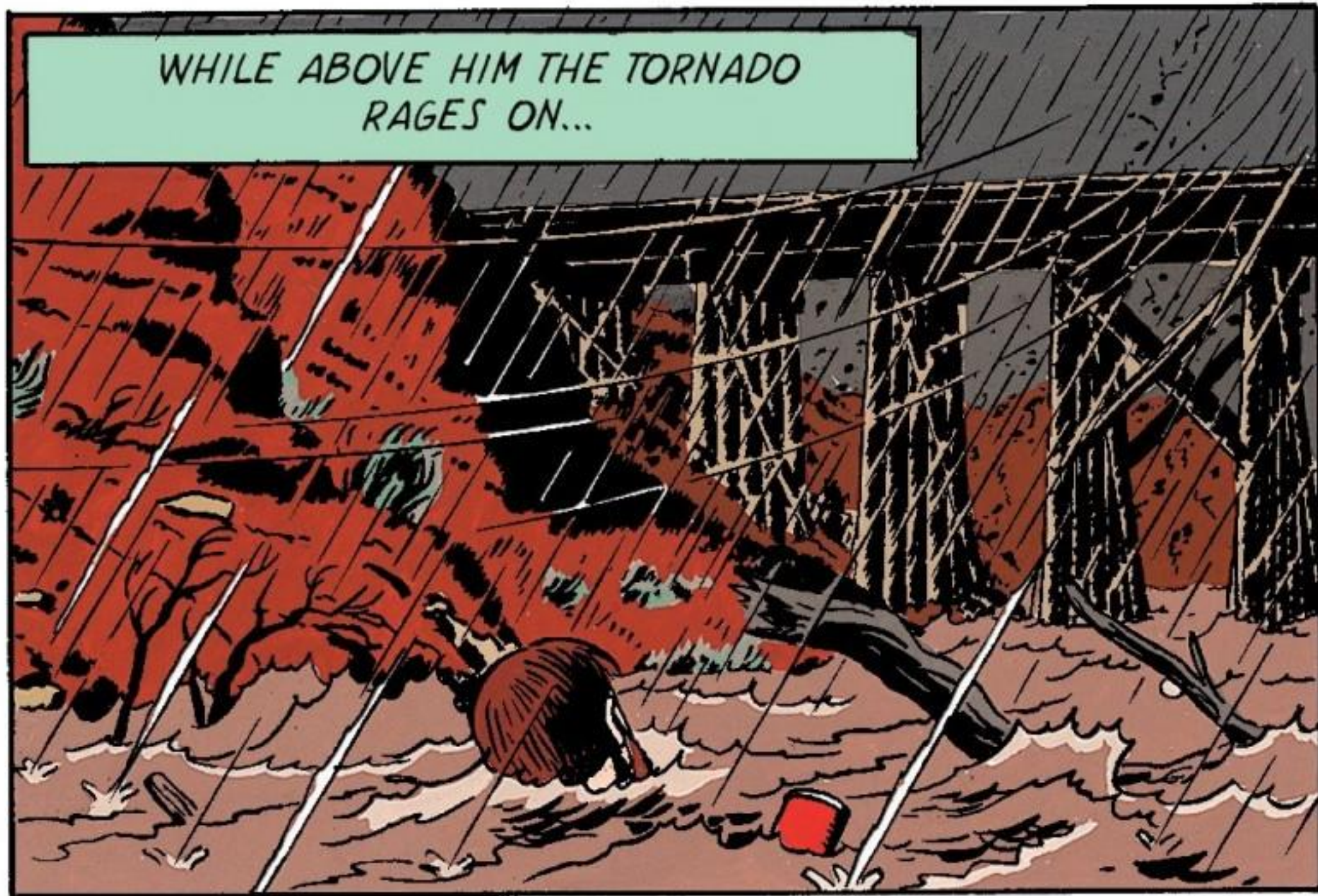
... AND THROW HIMSELF OUT OF THE OLDSMOBILE JUST BEFORE IT TIPS INTO THE WATER.

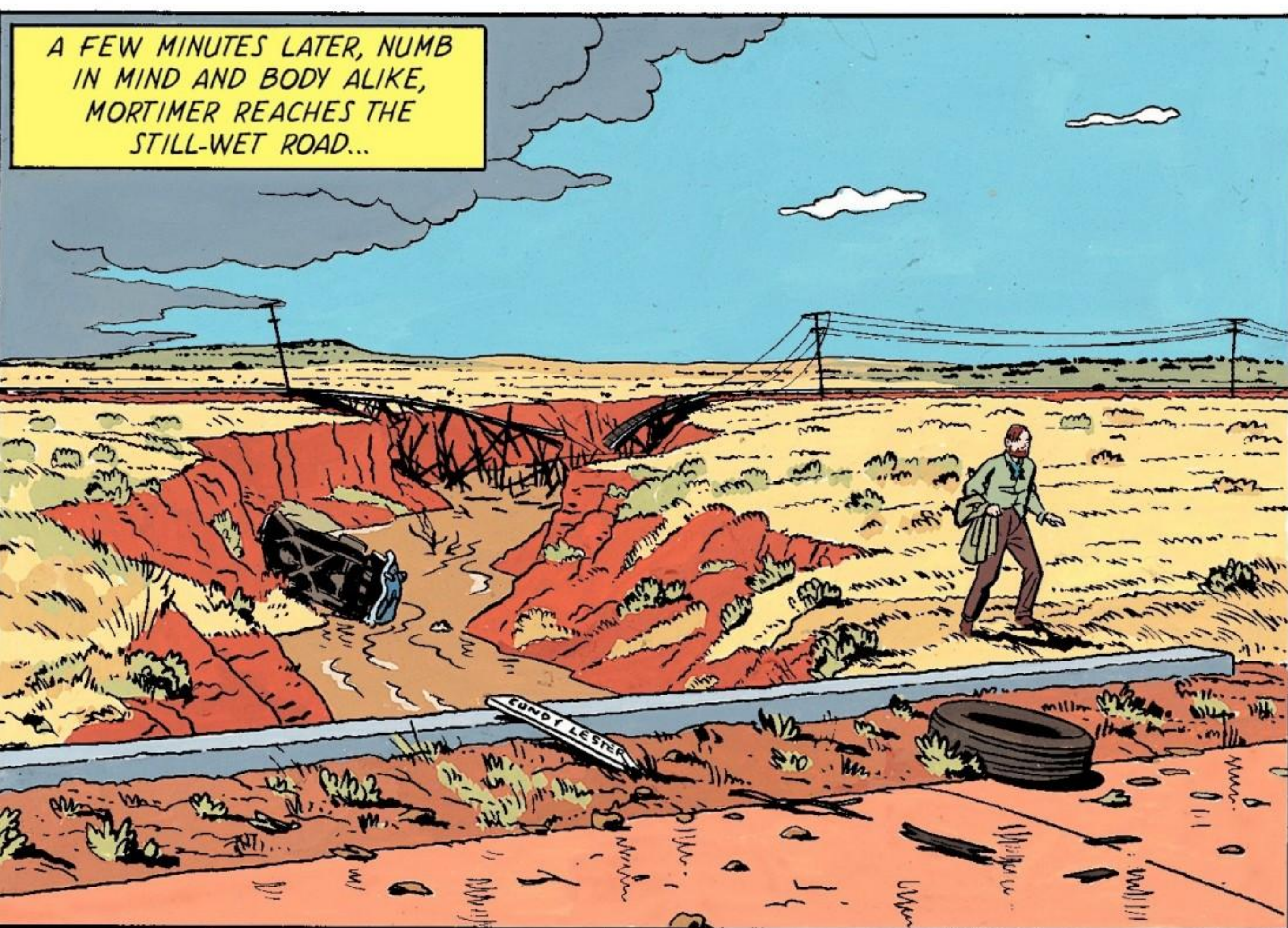
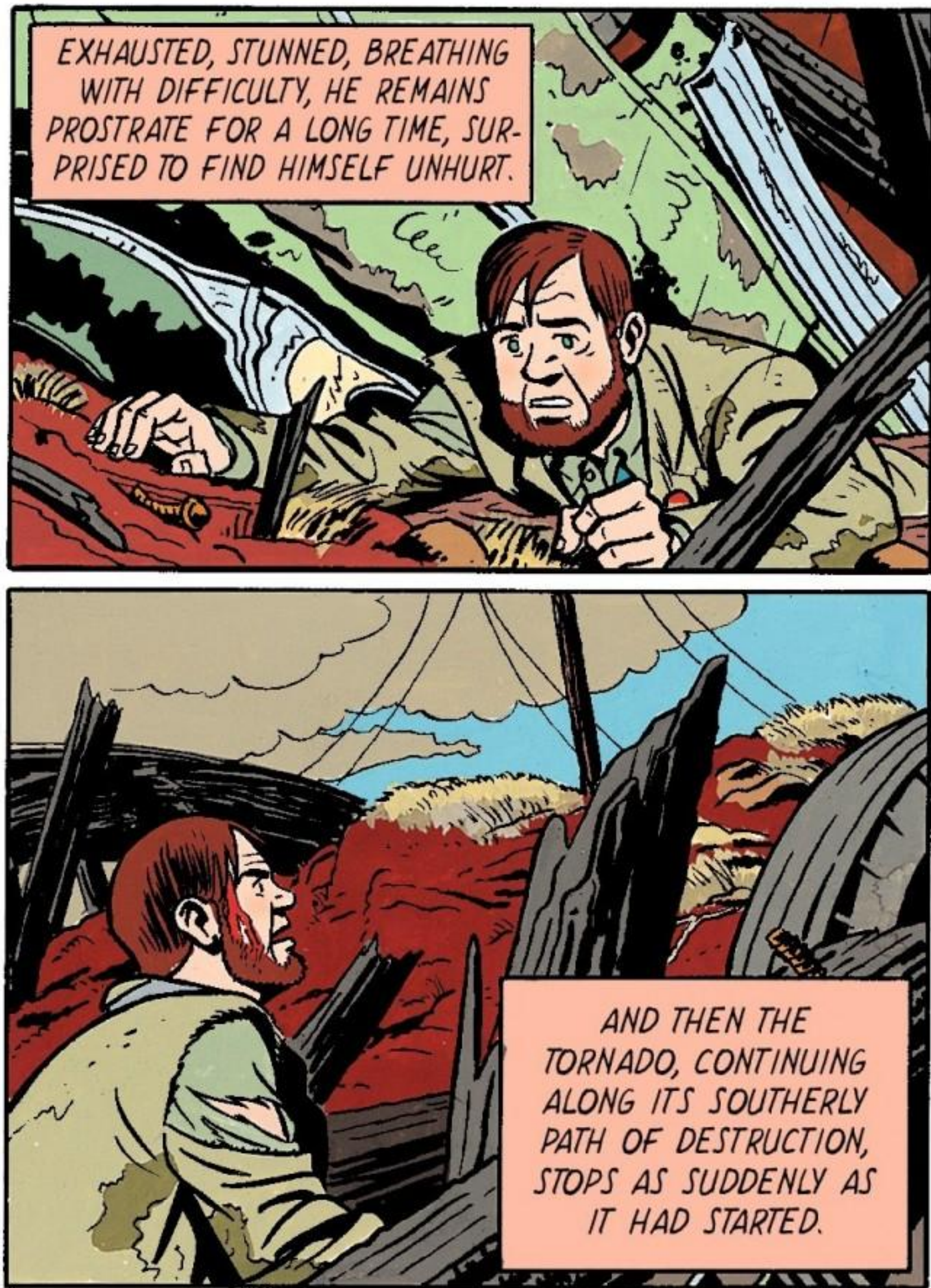


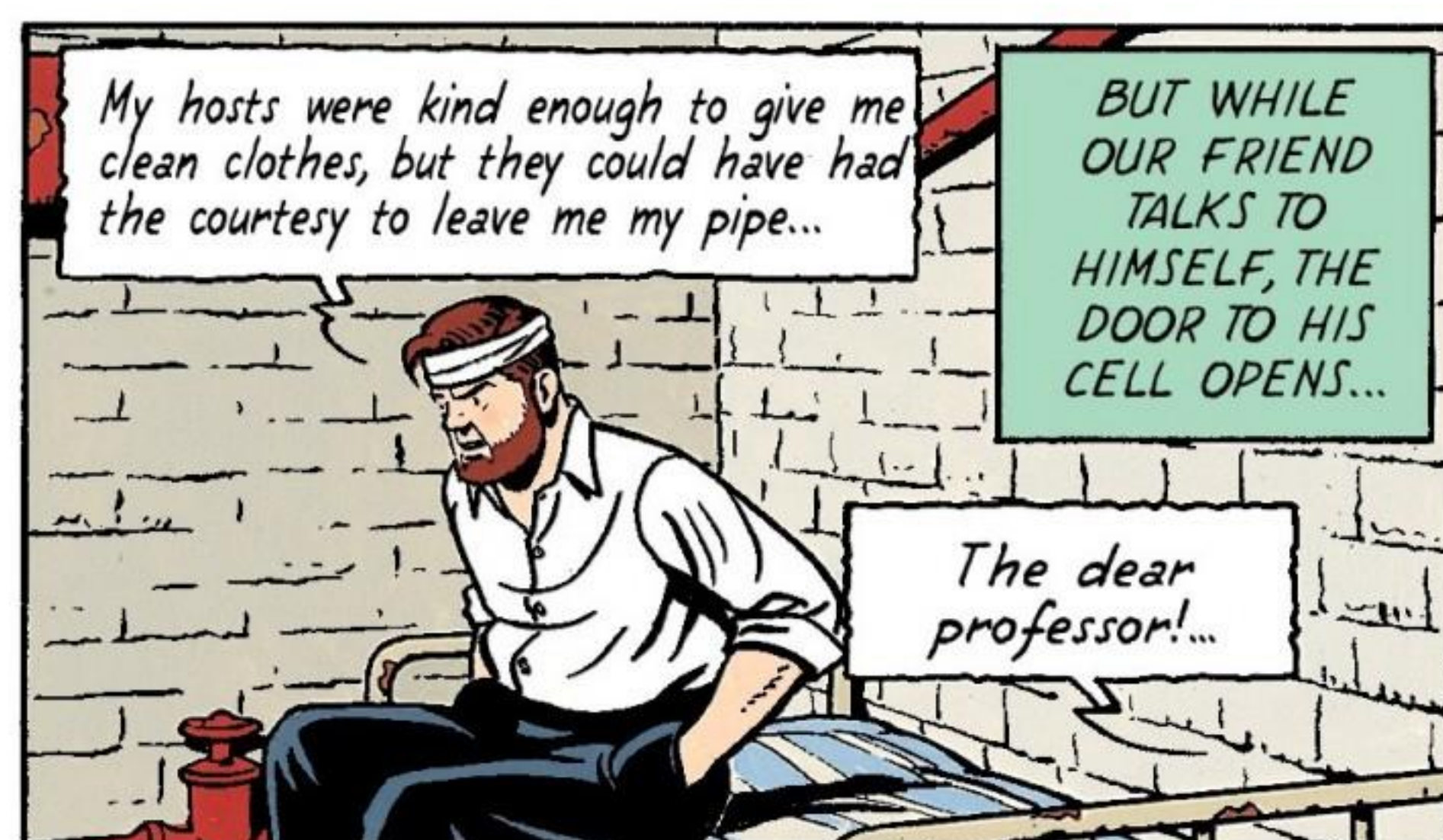
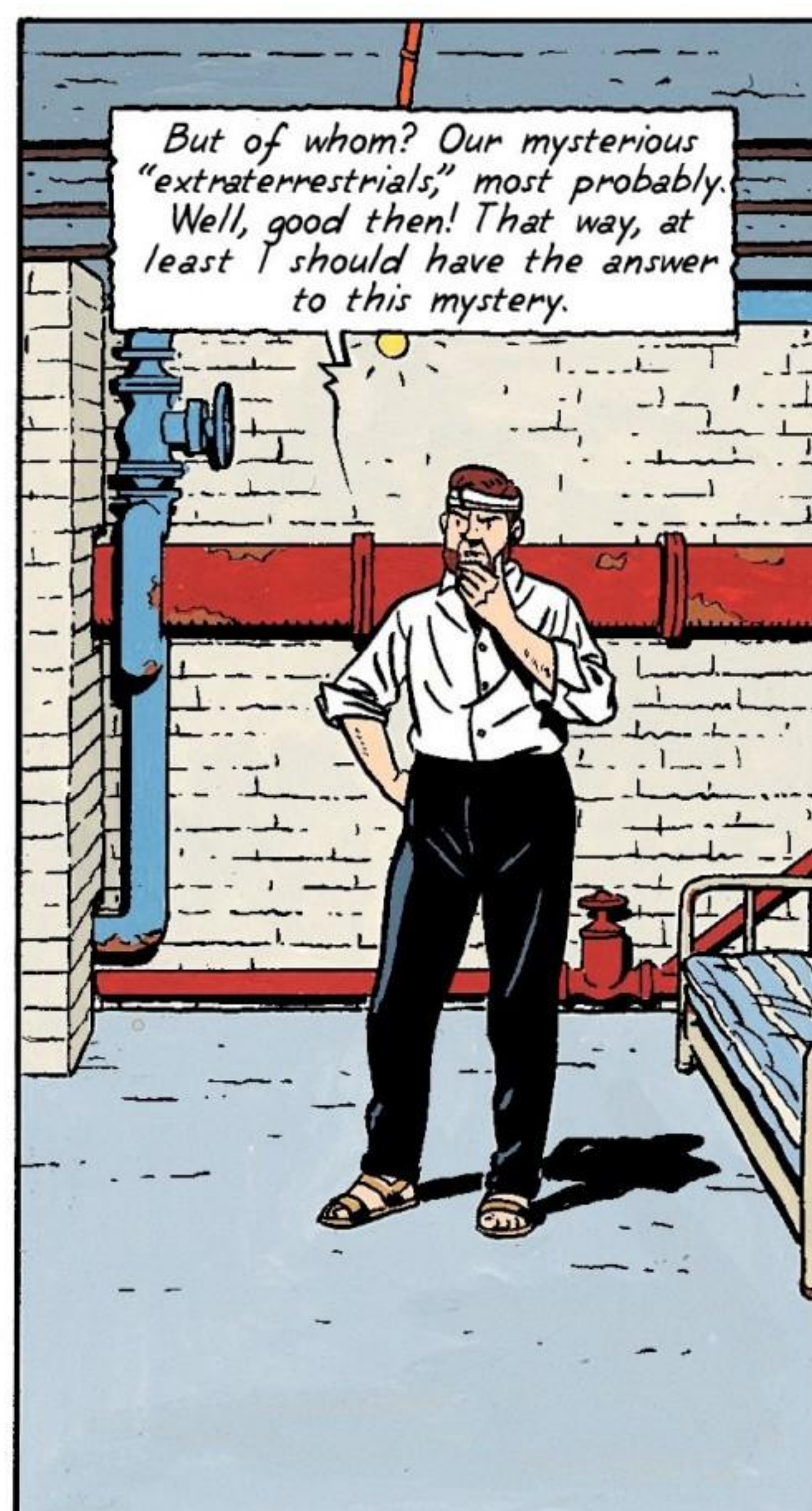
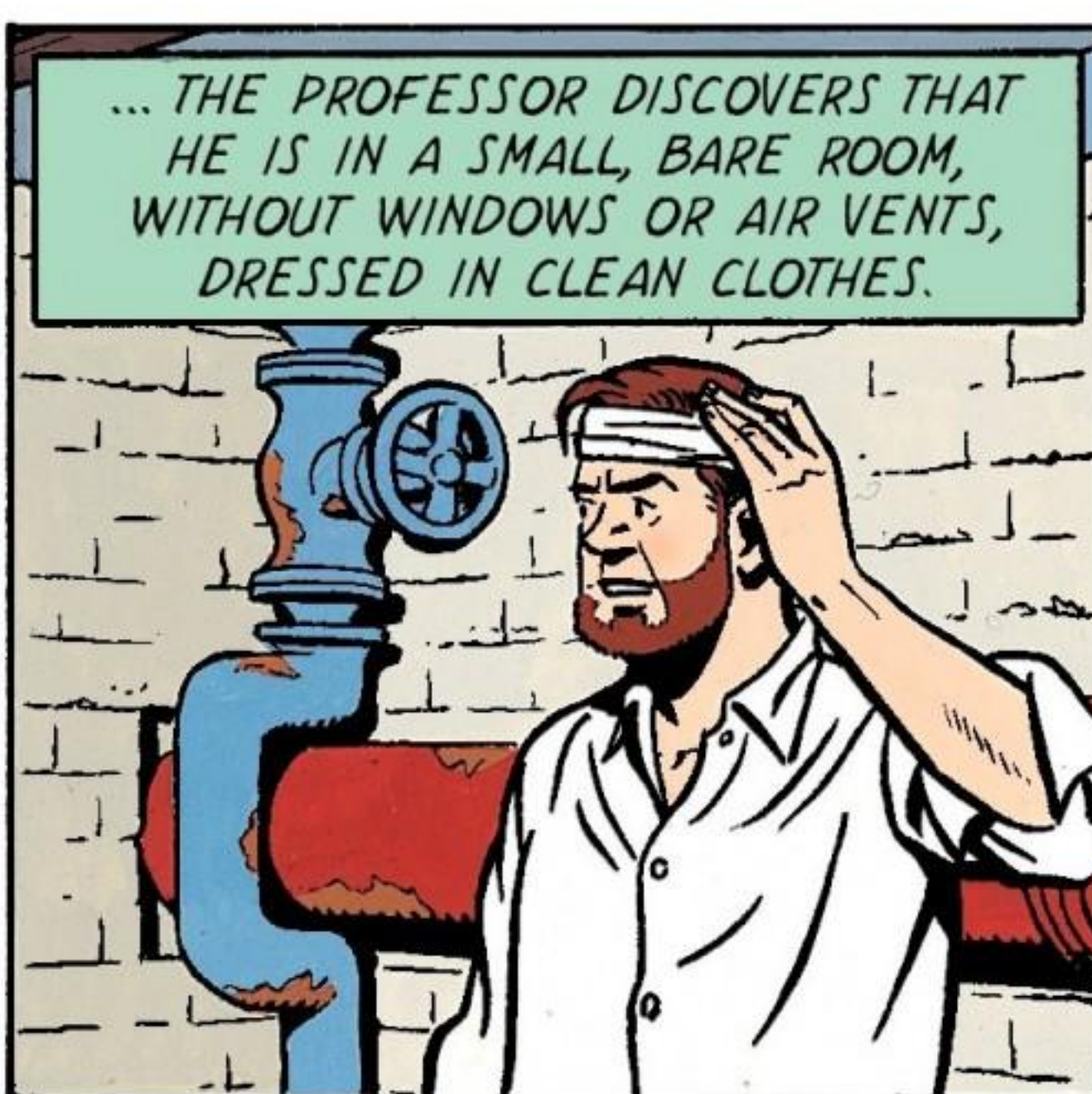
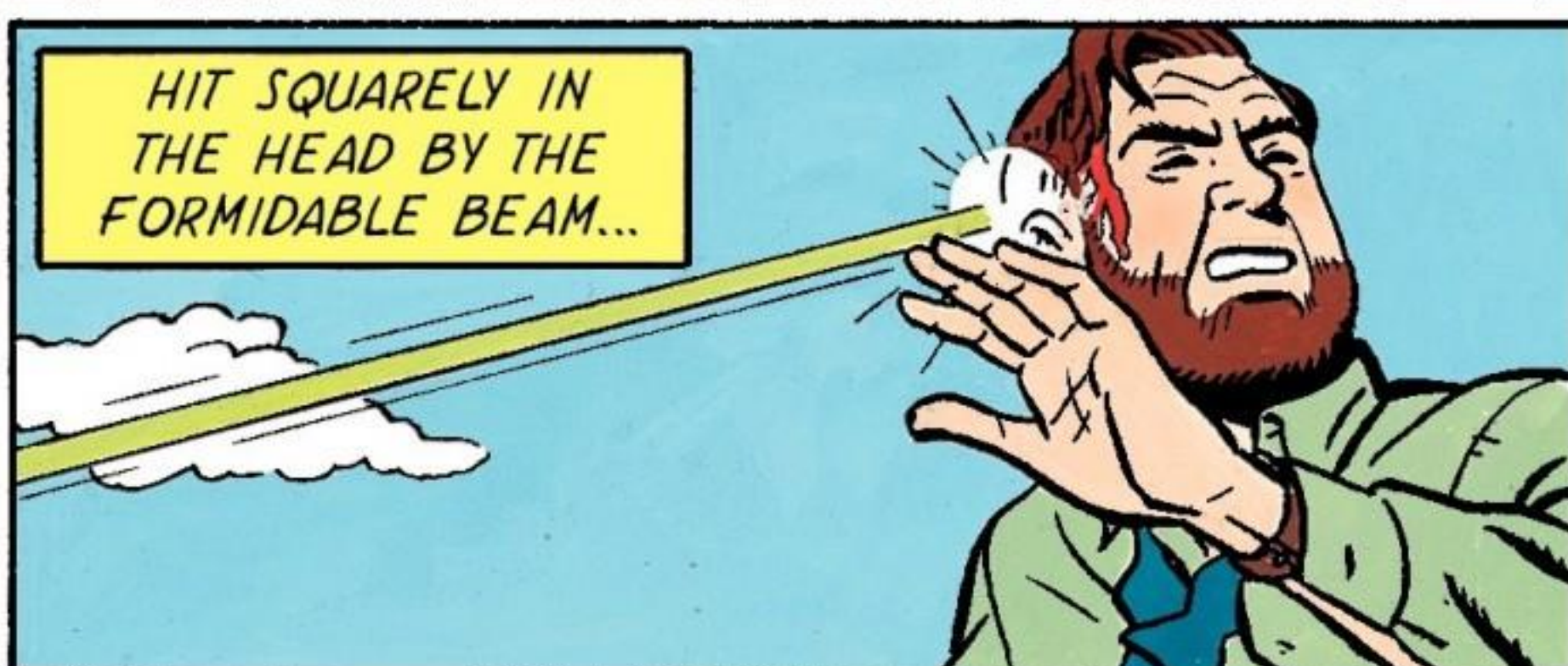
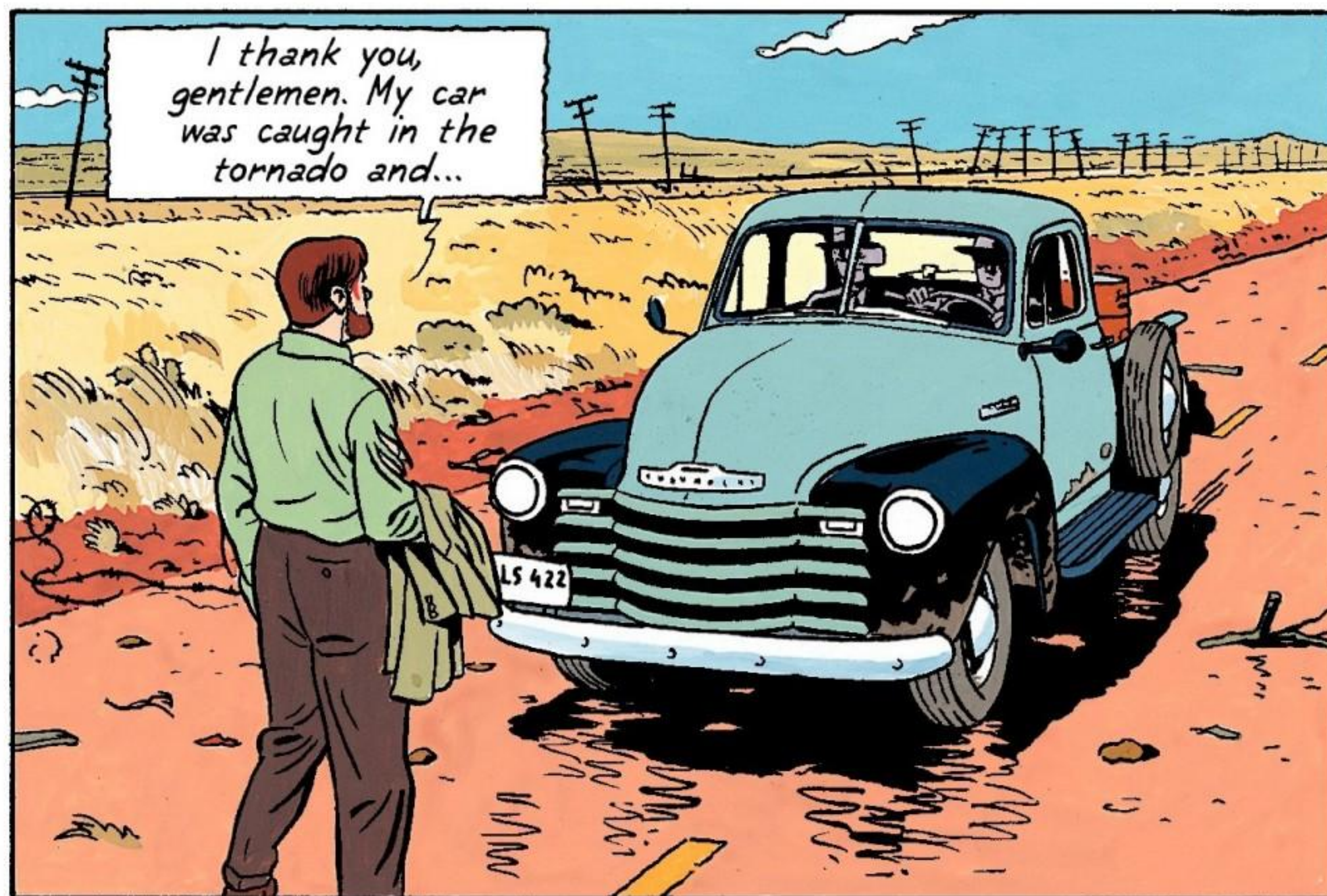
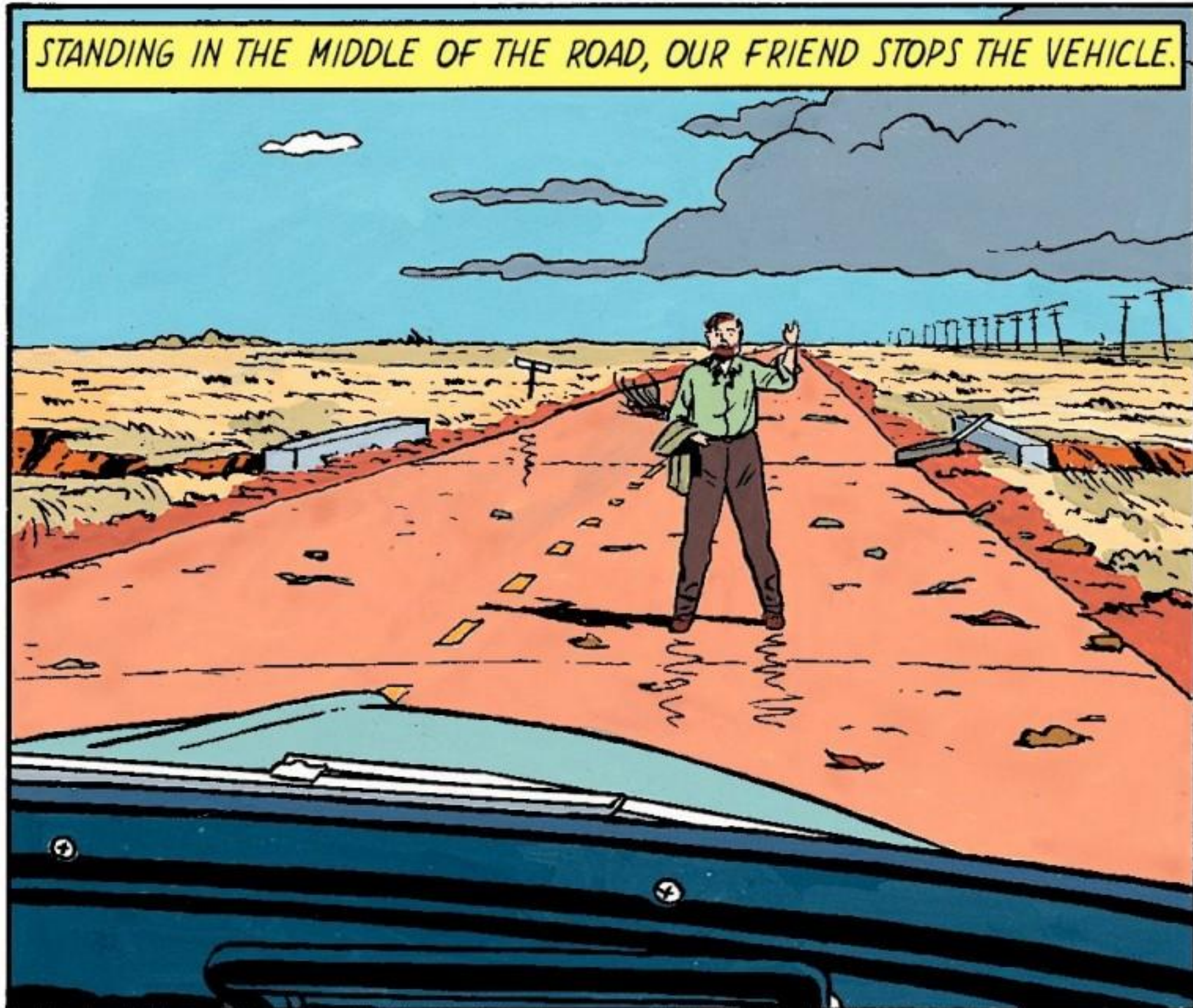
FINGERS CLUTCHING AT THE ROCKY EARTH, MORTIMER FRANTICALLY ATTEMPTS TO RESIST THE FURIOUS WIND...



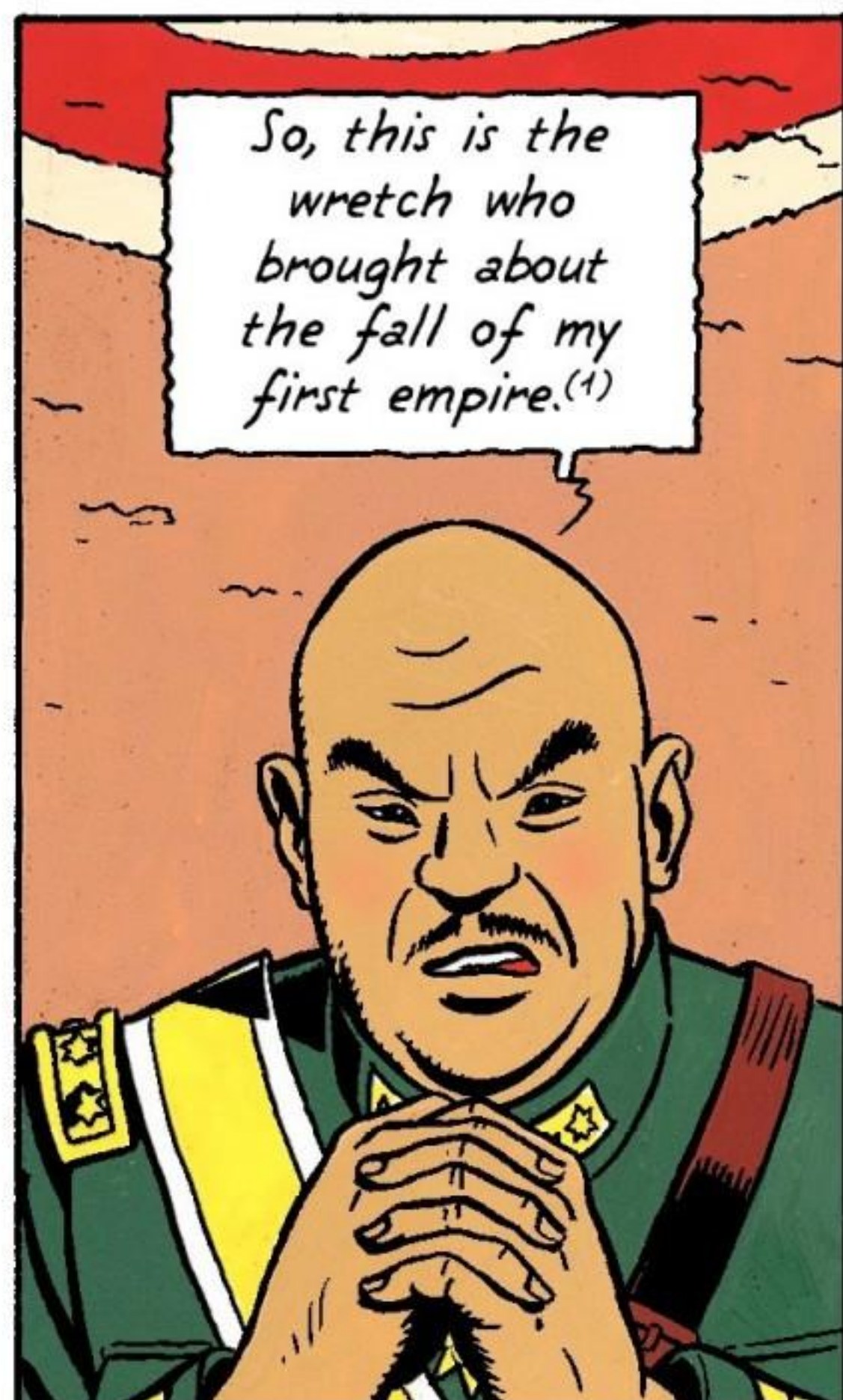
... BUT IT PROVES TOO STRONG FOR HIM, AND HE IS HURLED IN TURN INTO THE FLOW OF STONES AND MUD THAT CARRIES HIM AWAY ALONG ITS DEADLY COURSE.



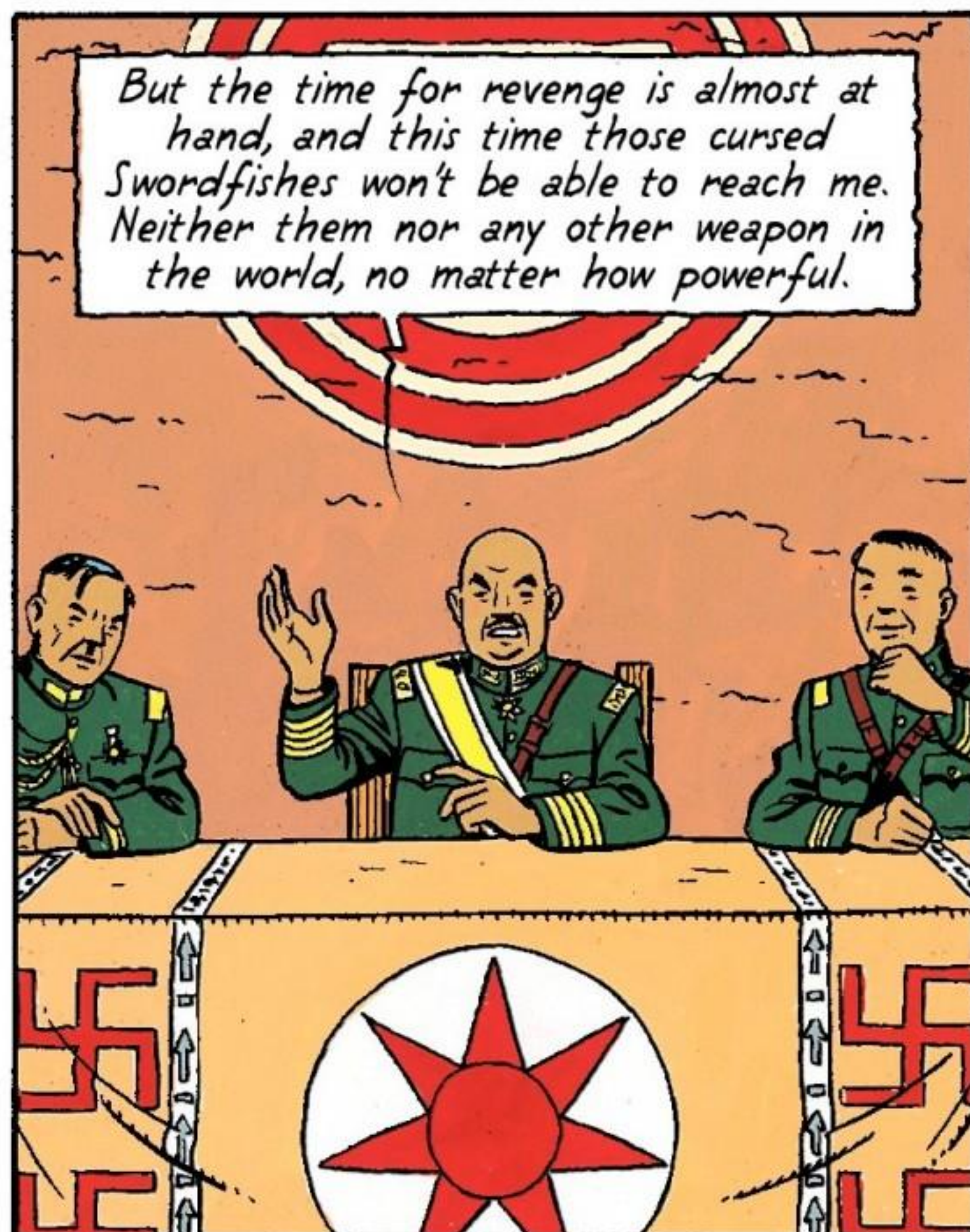








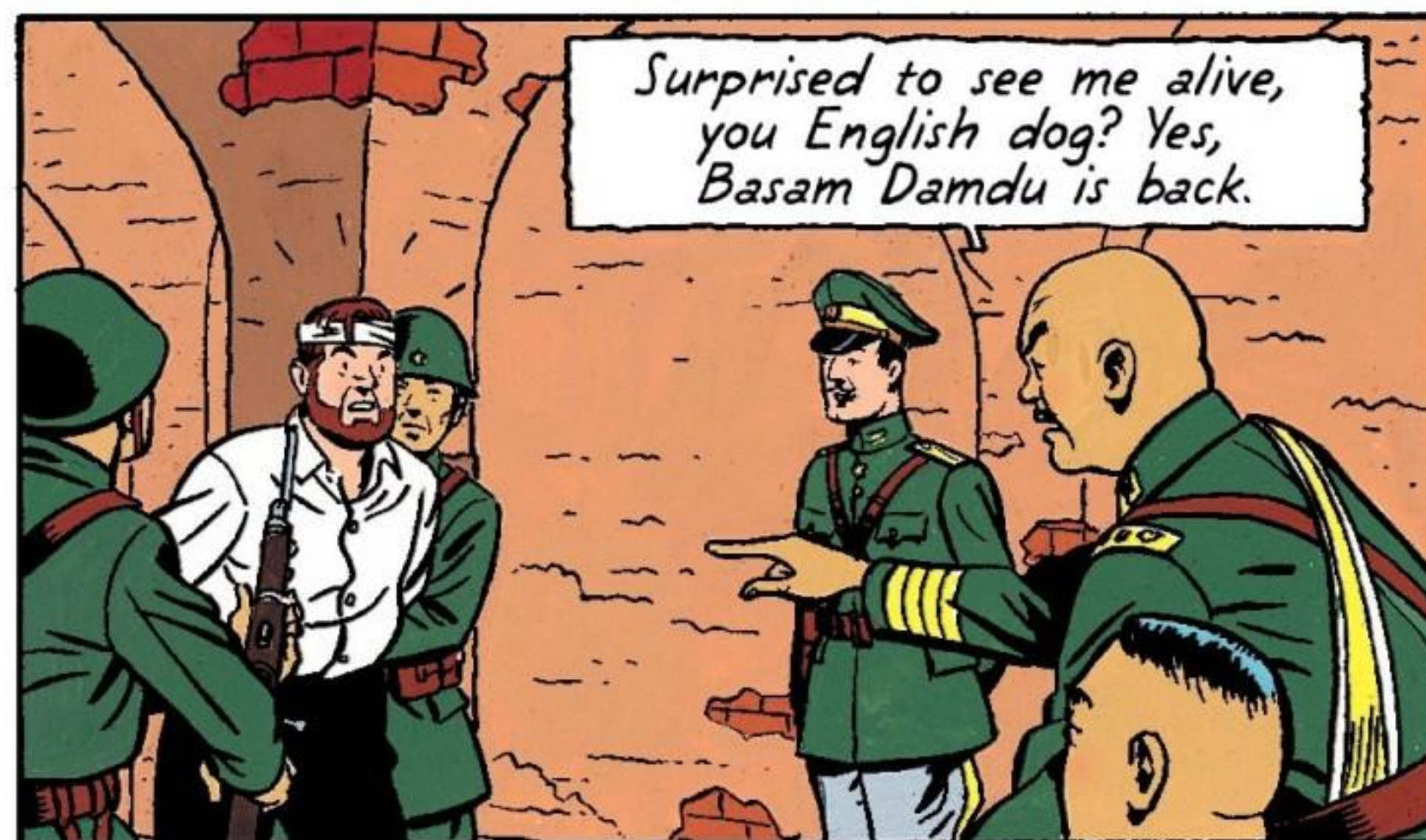
So, this is the wretch who brought about the fall of my first empire.⁽¹⁾



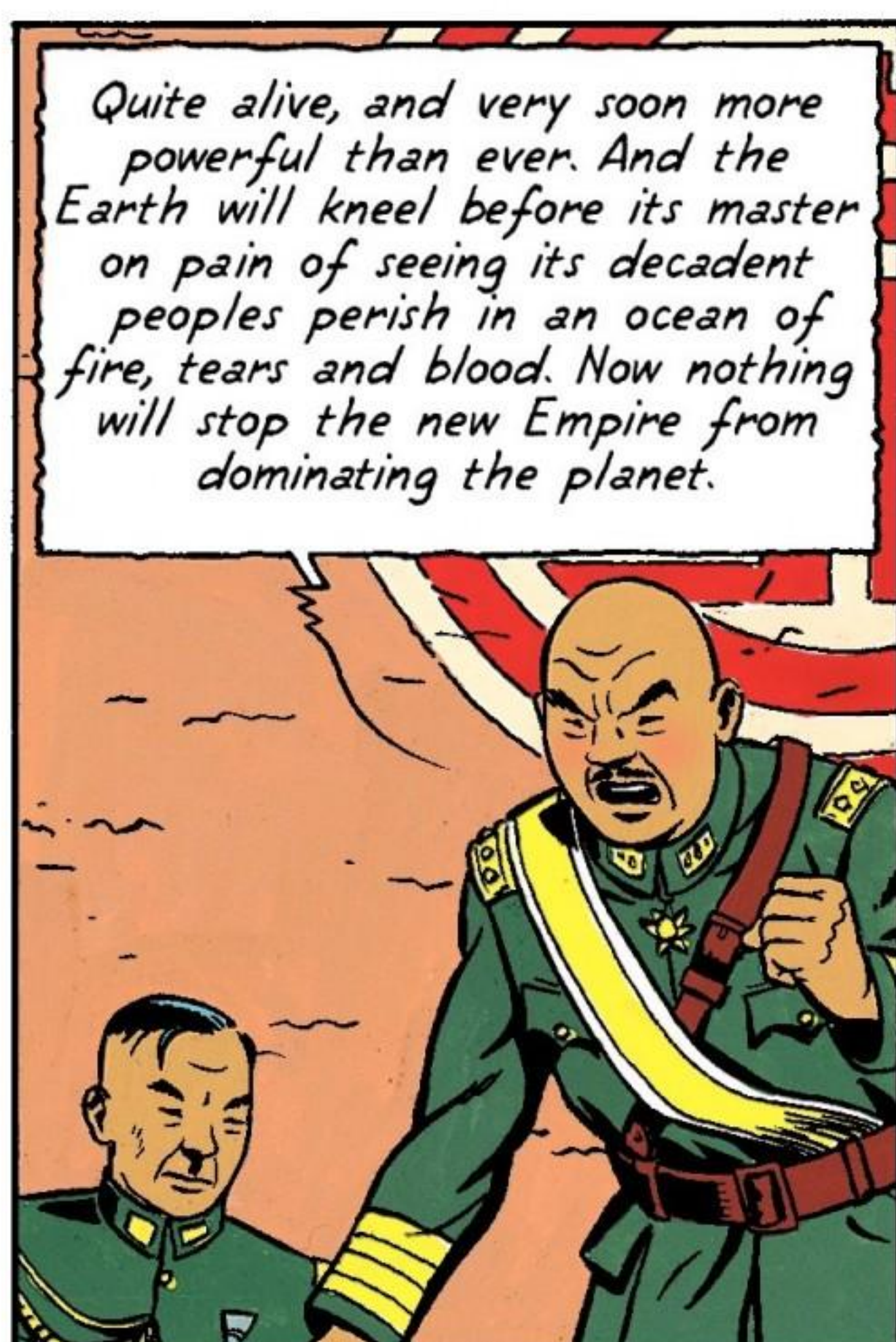
But the time for revenge is almost at hand, and this time those cursed Swordfishes won't be able to reach me. Neither them nor any other weapon in the world, no matter how powerful.



Basam Damdu... The Yellow Emperor... That's impossible... This is a nightmare...



Surprised to see me alive, you English dog? Yes, Basam Damdu is back.

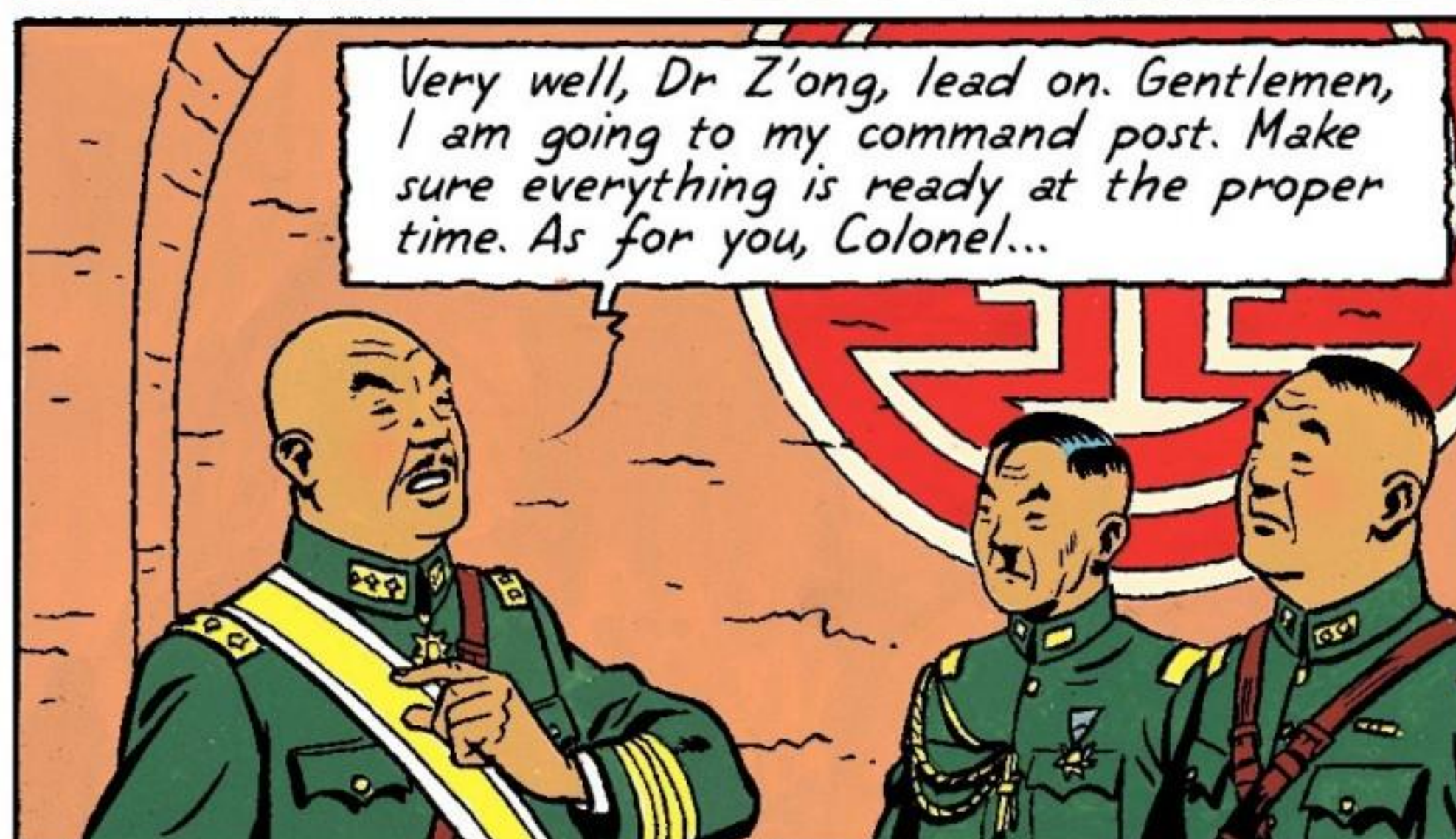


Quite alive, and very soon more powerful than ever. And the Earth will kneel before its master on pain of seeing its decadent peoples perish in an ocean of fire, tears and blood. Now nothing will stop the new Empire from dominating the planet.

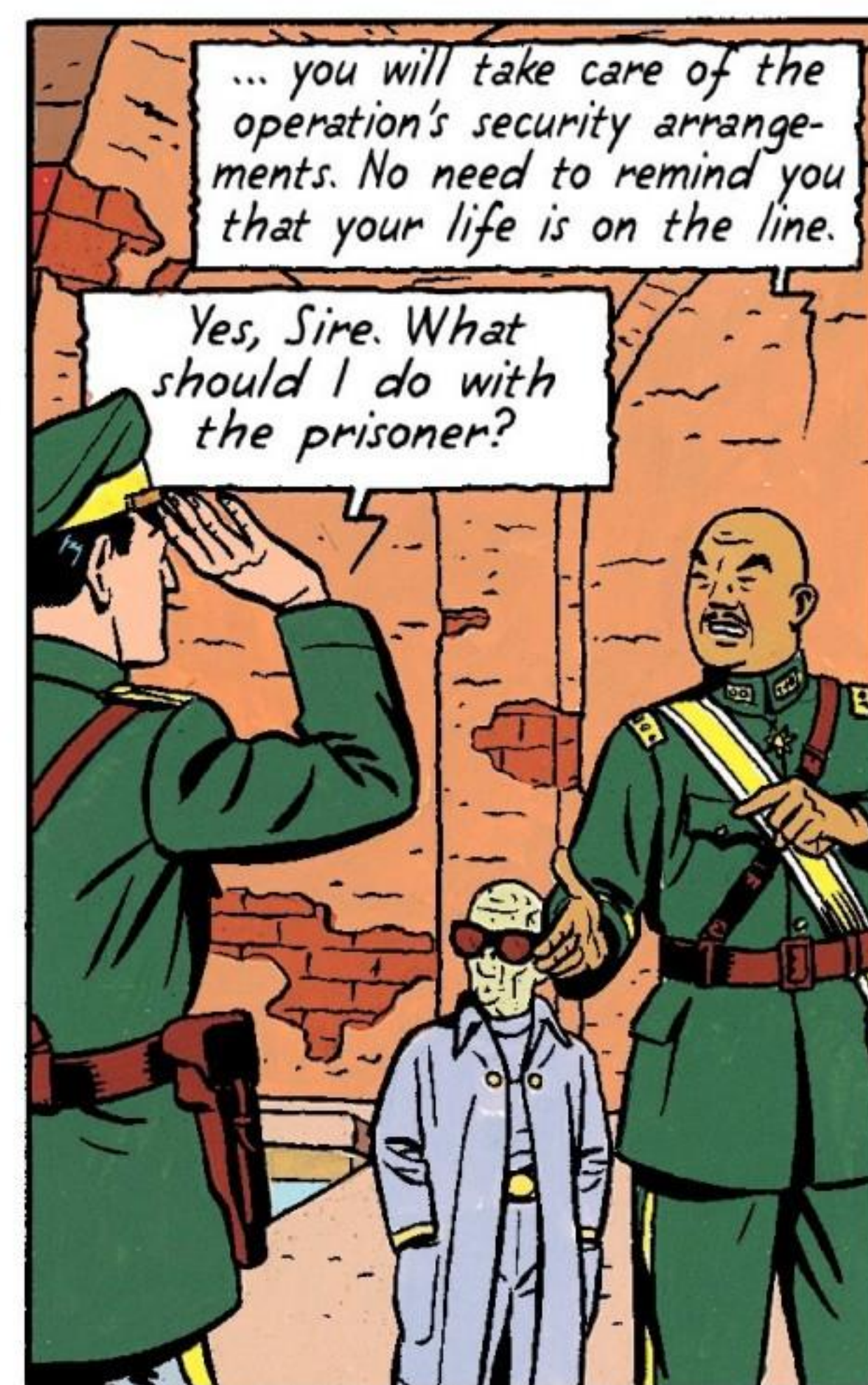


AT THAT MOMENT, A STRANGE LITTLE BEING WEARING ENORMOUS SUNGLASSES WALKS INTO THE ROOM.

Pardon me, Sire, but it is time for you to prepare.

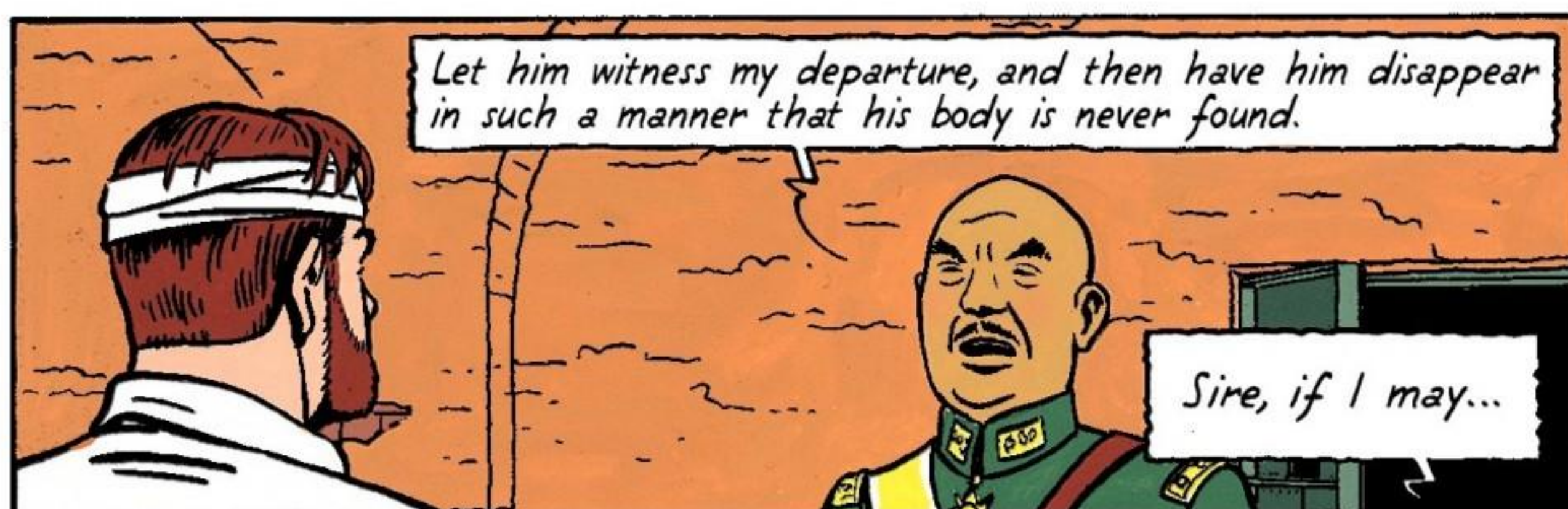


Very well, Dr Z'ong, lead on. Gentlemen, I am going to my command post. Make sure everything is ready at the proper time. As for you, Colonel...



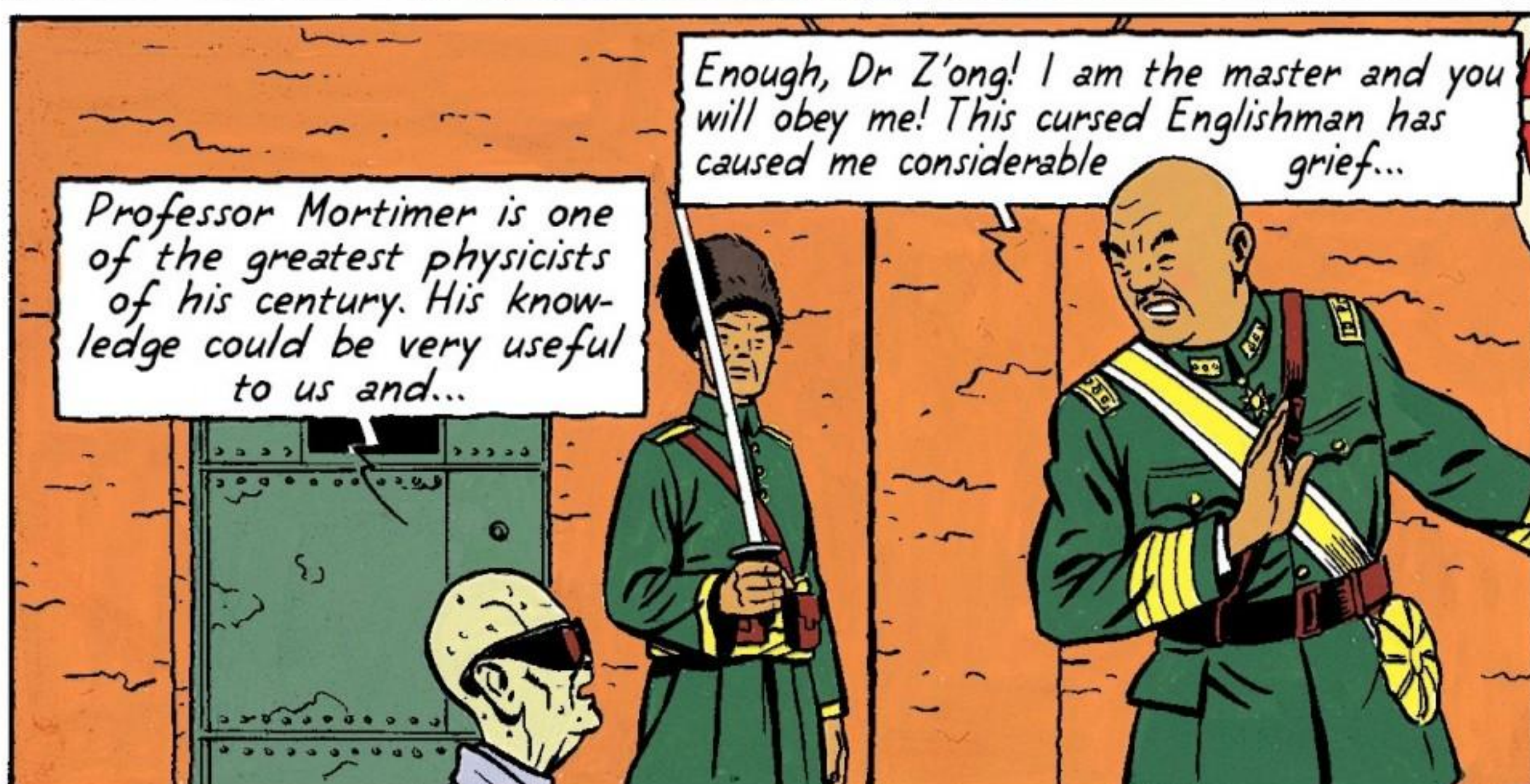
... you will take care of the operation's security arrangements. No need to remind you that your life is on the line.

Yes, Sire. What should I do with the prisoner?



Let him witness my departure, and then have him disappear in such a manner that his body is never found.

Sire, if I may...



Enough, Dr Z'ong! I am the master and you will obey me! This cursed Englishman has caused me considerable grief...

Professor Mortimer is one of the greatest physicists of his century. His knowledge could be very useful to us and...



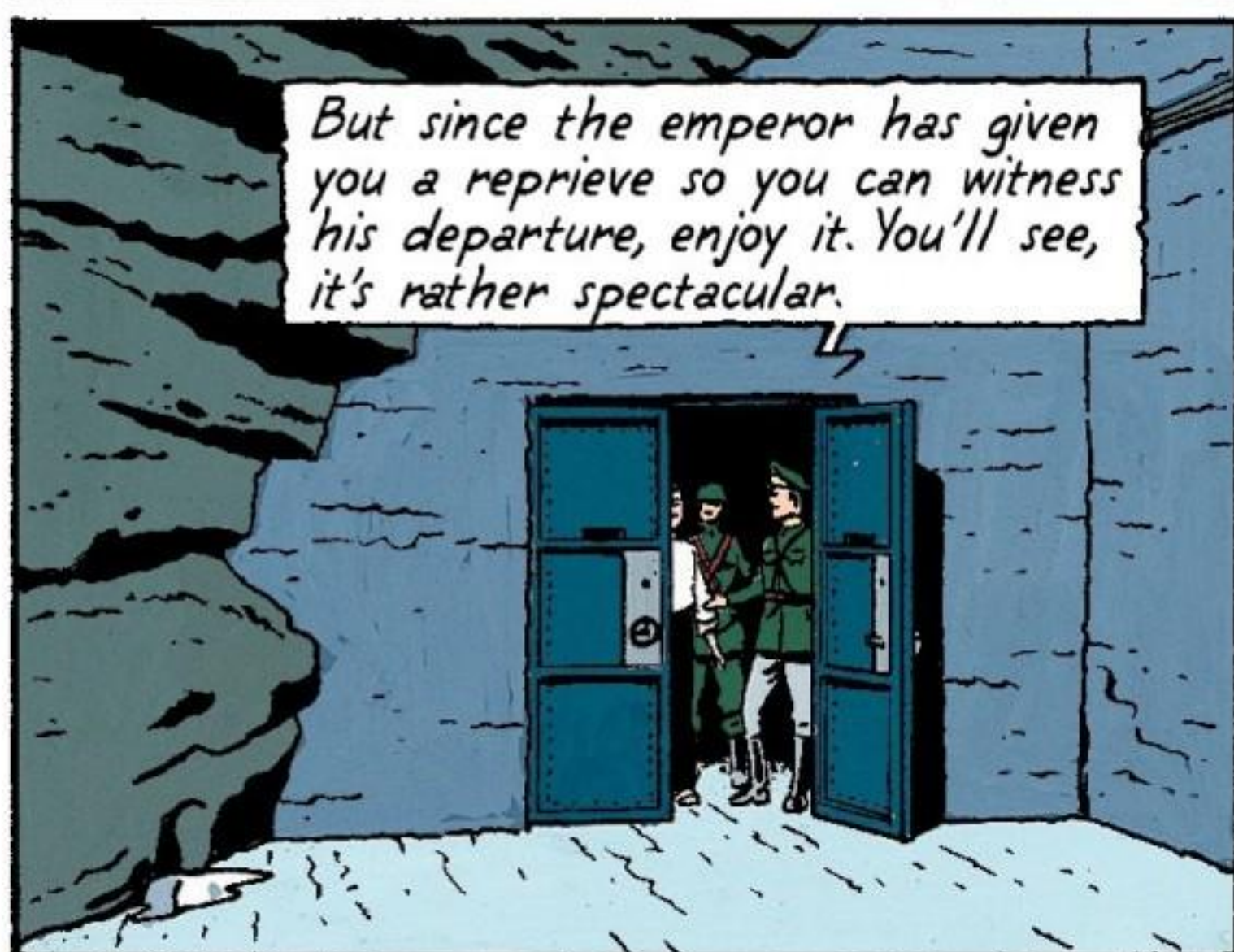
I do not want him to see the sun rise. I have spoken!

⁽¹⁾ See The Secret of the Swordfish.

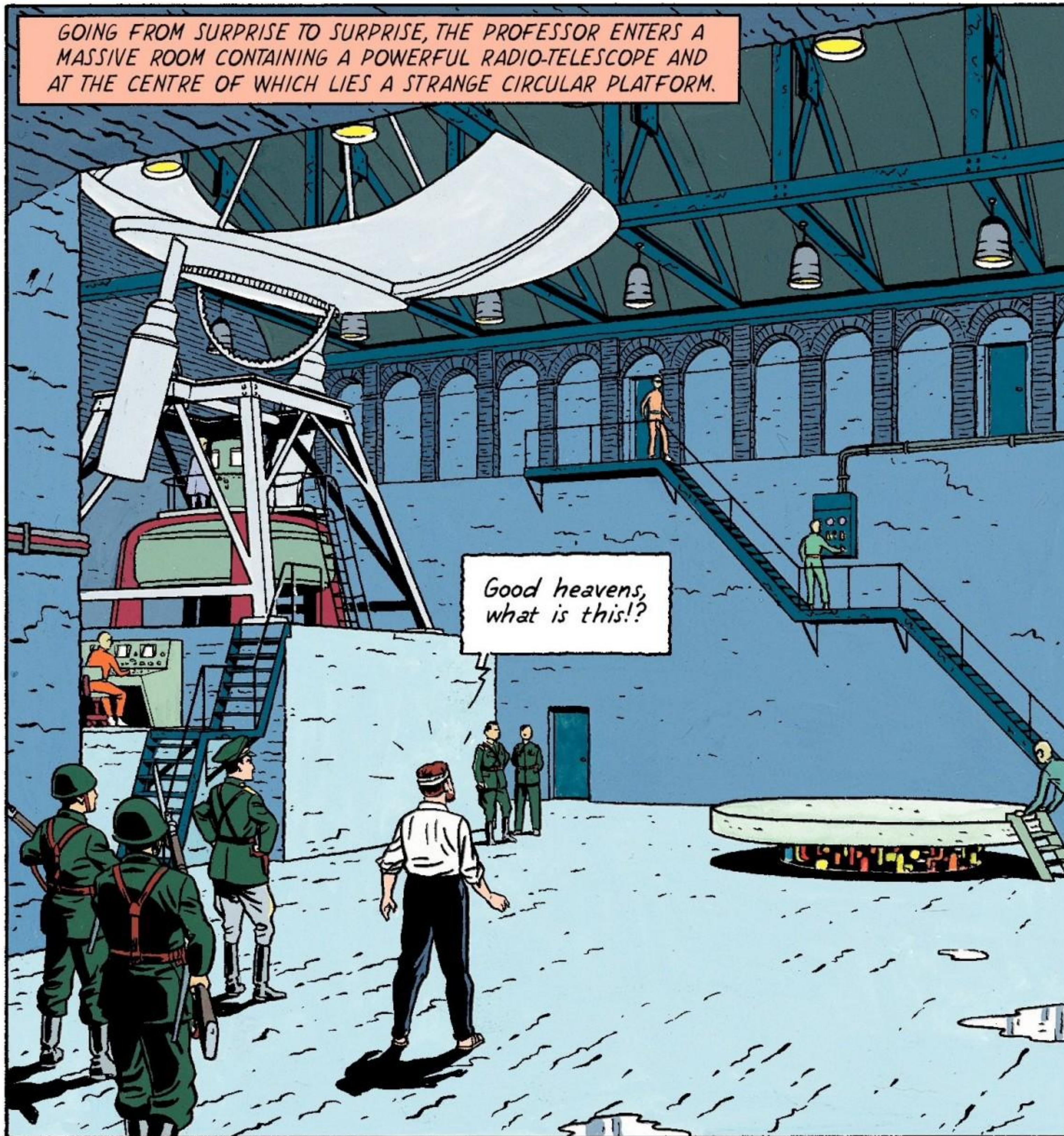


STILL SHOCKED TO THE CORE BY THE EVENTS THAT HAVE KEPT HIM MUTE TILL NOW, MORTIMER FOLLOWS HIS CAPTORS WITHOUT RESISTING.

It would seem your fate is sealed, Professor. I have been waiting for this moment for many a year.



But since the emperor has given you a reprieve so you can witness his departure, enjoy it. You'll see, it's rather spectacular.

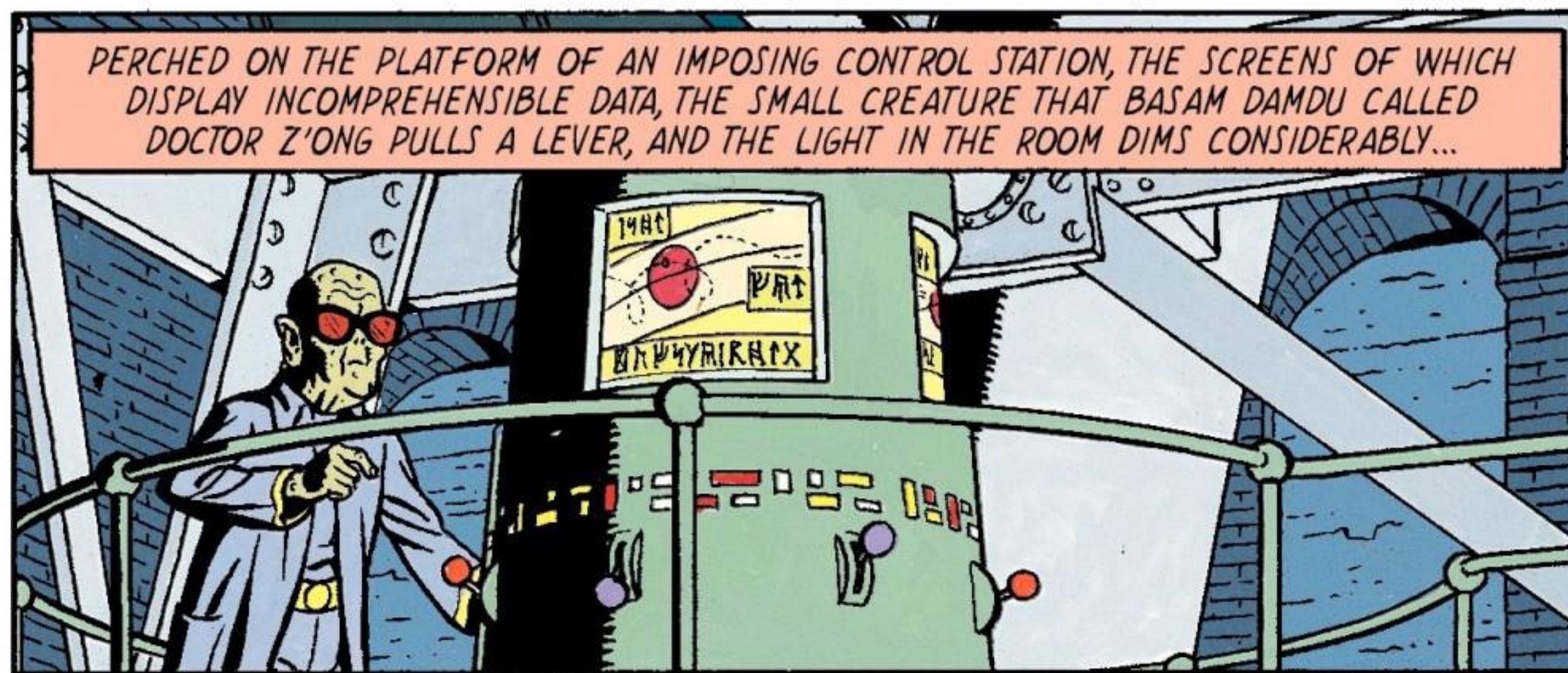


GOING FROM SURPRISE TO SURPRISE, THE PROFESSOR ENTERS A MASSIVE ROOM CONTAINING A POWERFUL RADIO-TELESCOPE AND AT THE CENTRE OF WHICH LIES A STRANGE CIRCULAR PLATFORM.

Good heavens, what is this!?



The most fantastic means of transportation ever to exist. You won't believe your eyes, my dear fellow.



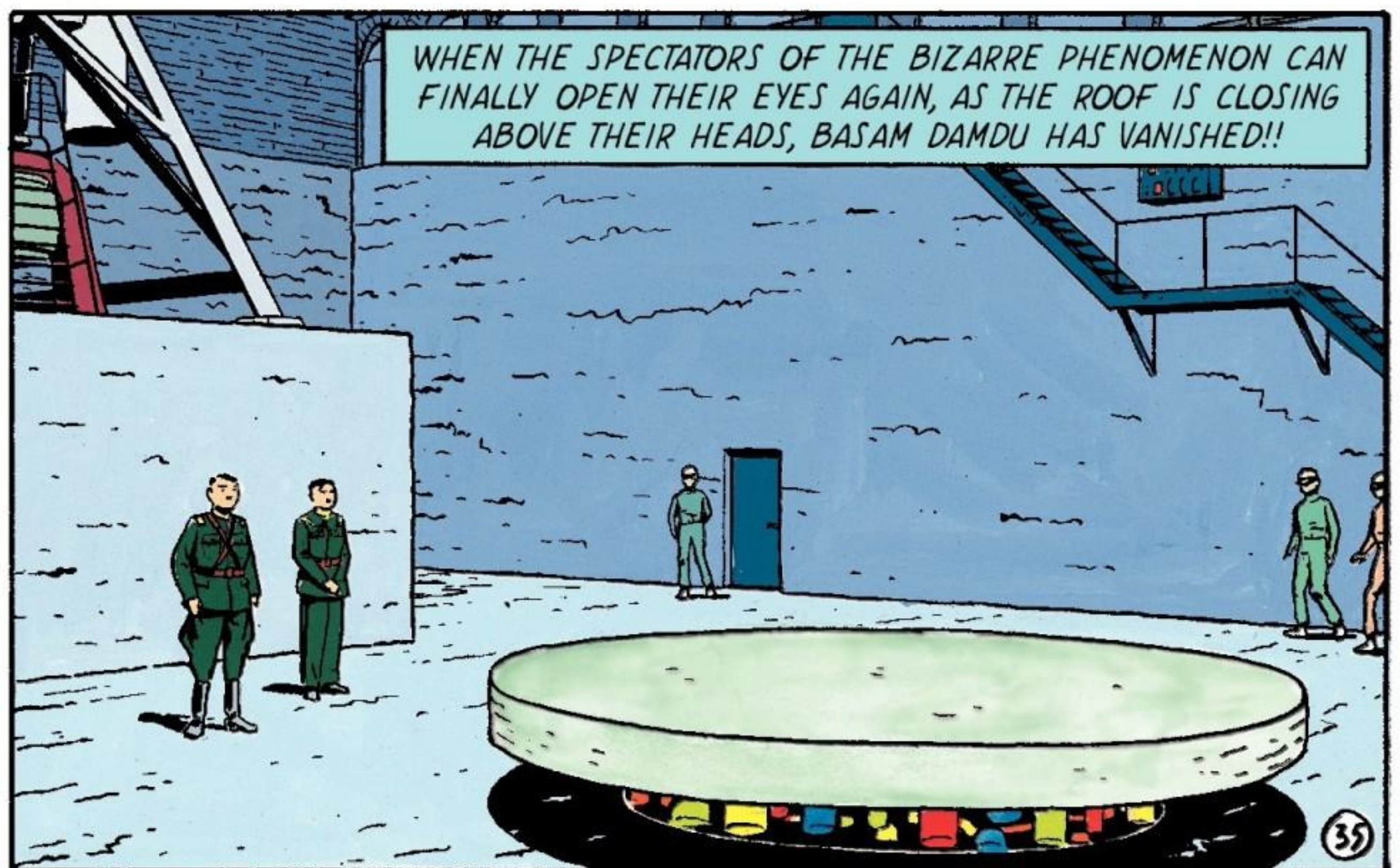
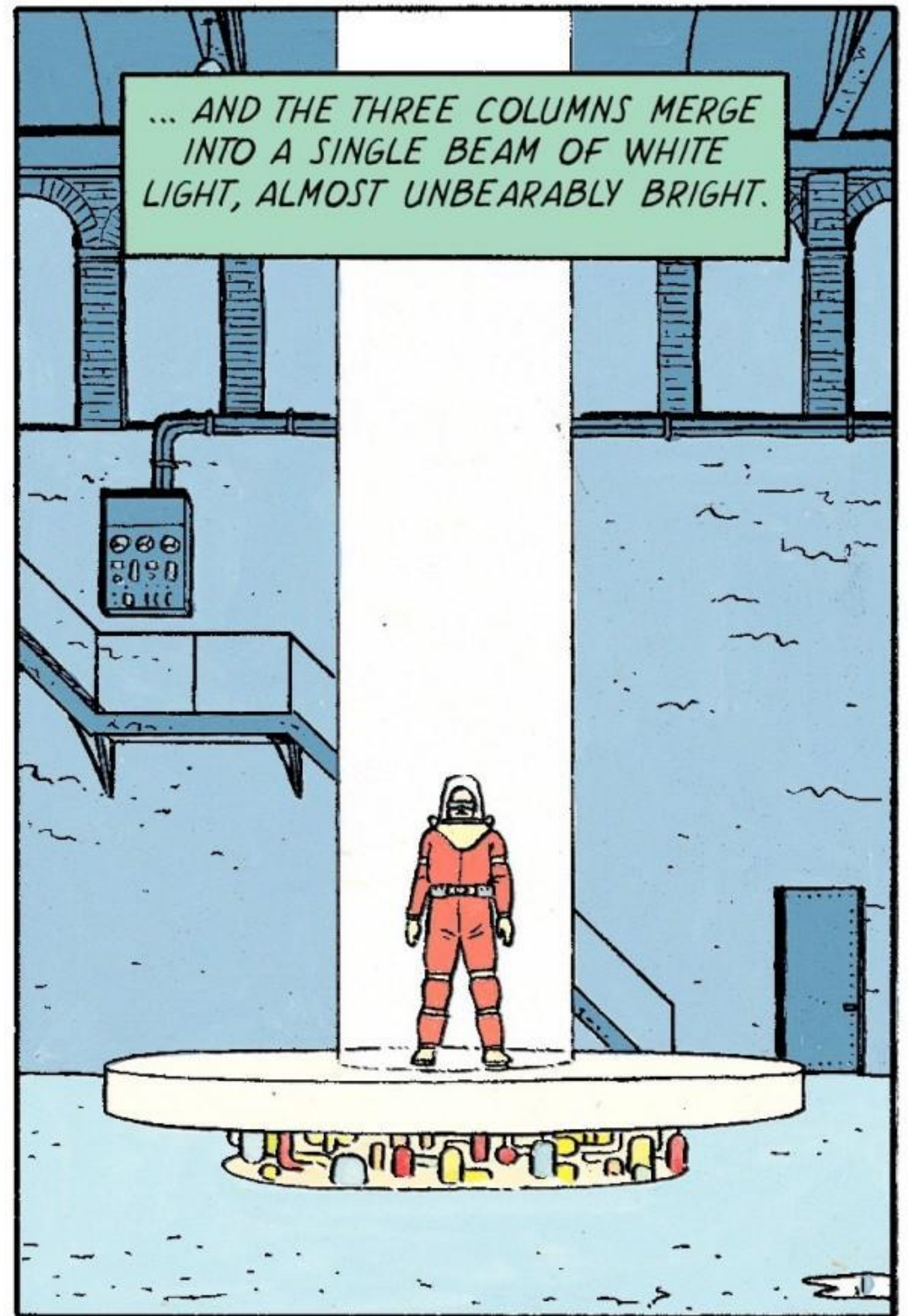
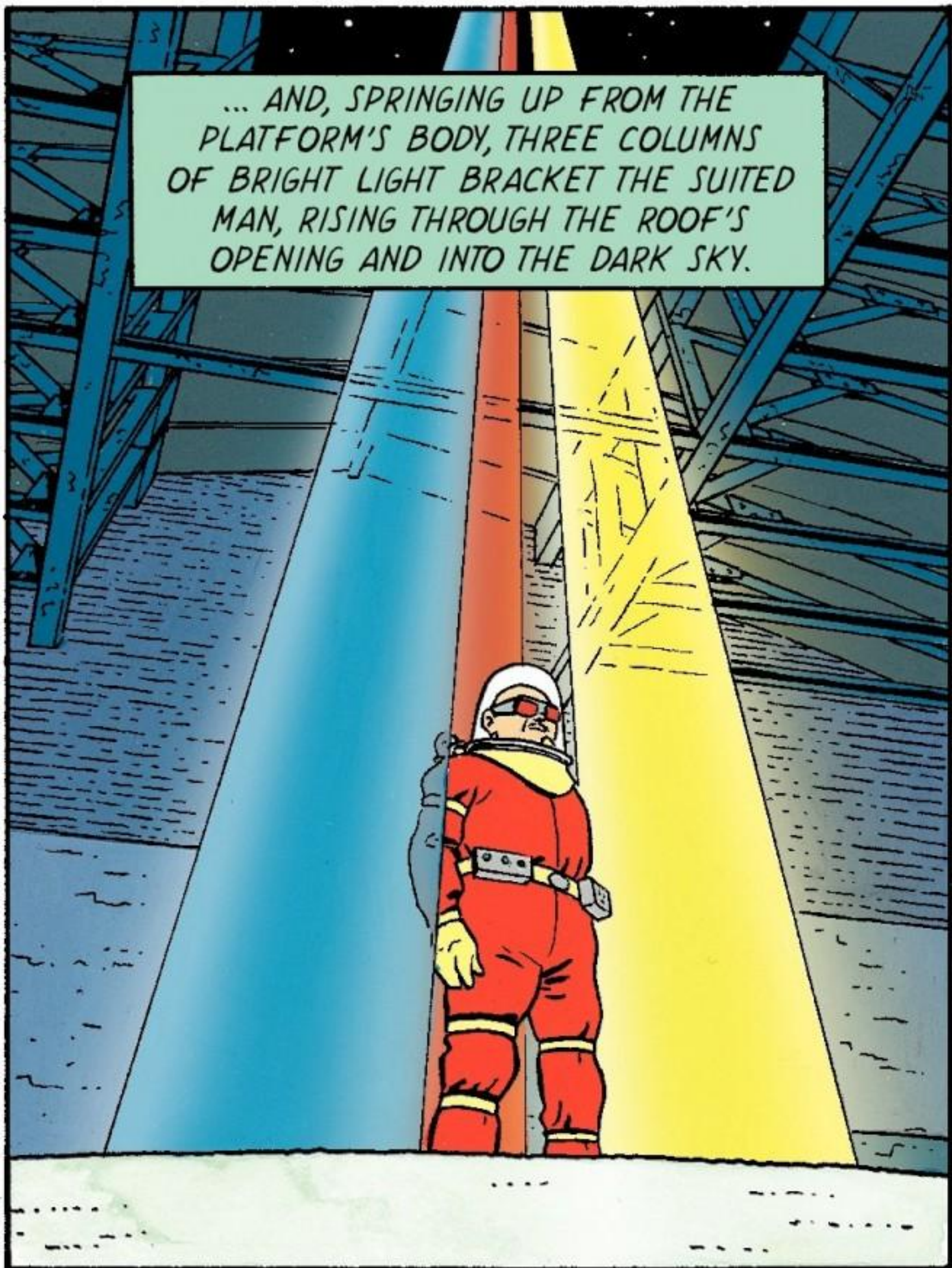
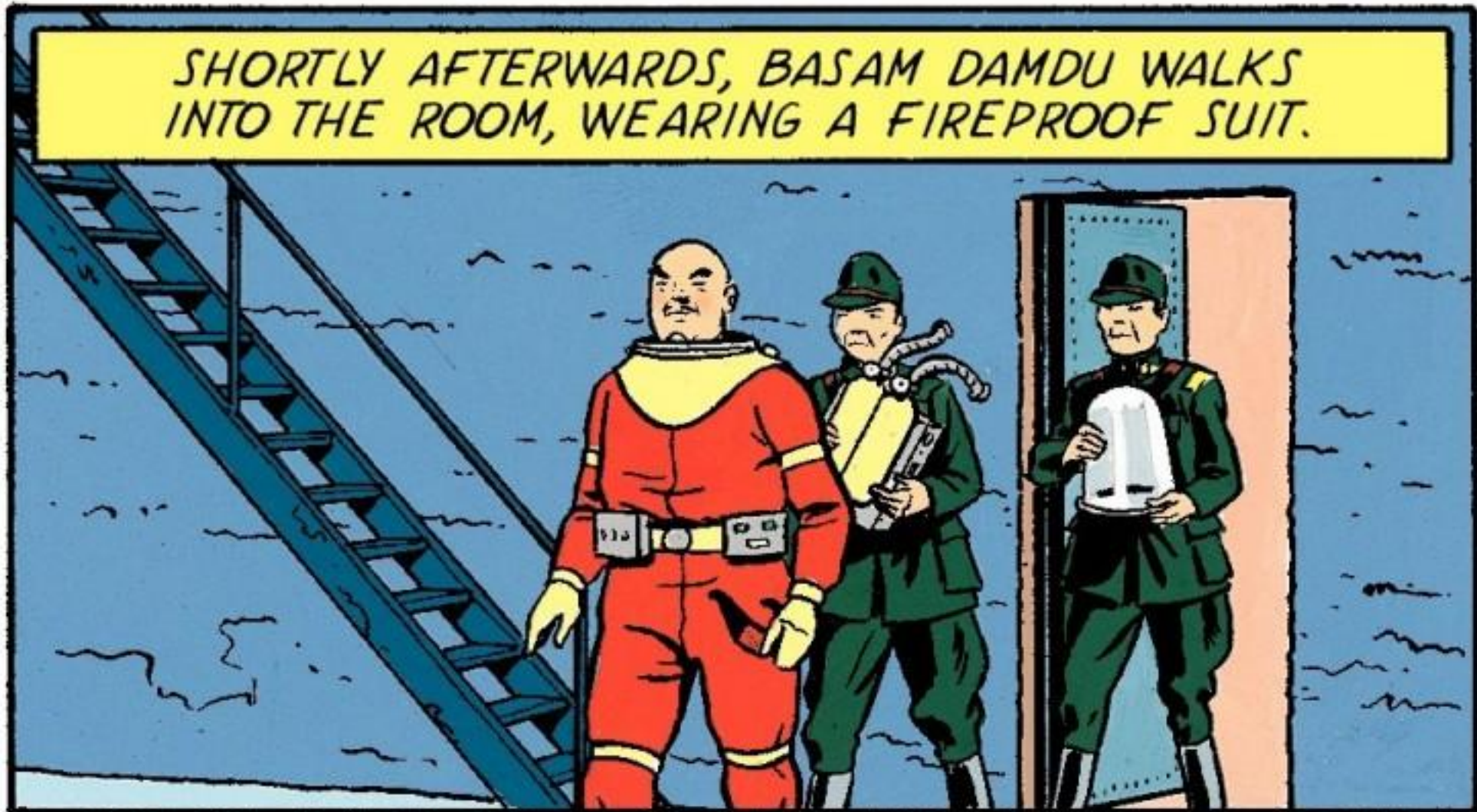
PERCHED ON THE PLATFORM OF AN IMPOSING CONTROL STATION, THE SCREENS OF WHICH DISPLAY INCOMPREHENSIBLE DATA, THE SMALL CREATURE THAT BASAM DAMDU CALLED DOCTOR Z'ONG PULLS A LEVER, AND THE LIGHT IN THE ROOM DIMS CONSIDERABLY...



... AS A LARGE SECTION OF THE CEILING OPENS ONTO THE STARRY SKY...



... AND THE RADIO-TELESCOPE'S DISH EMERGES INTO THE SILENT NIGHT.





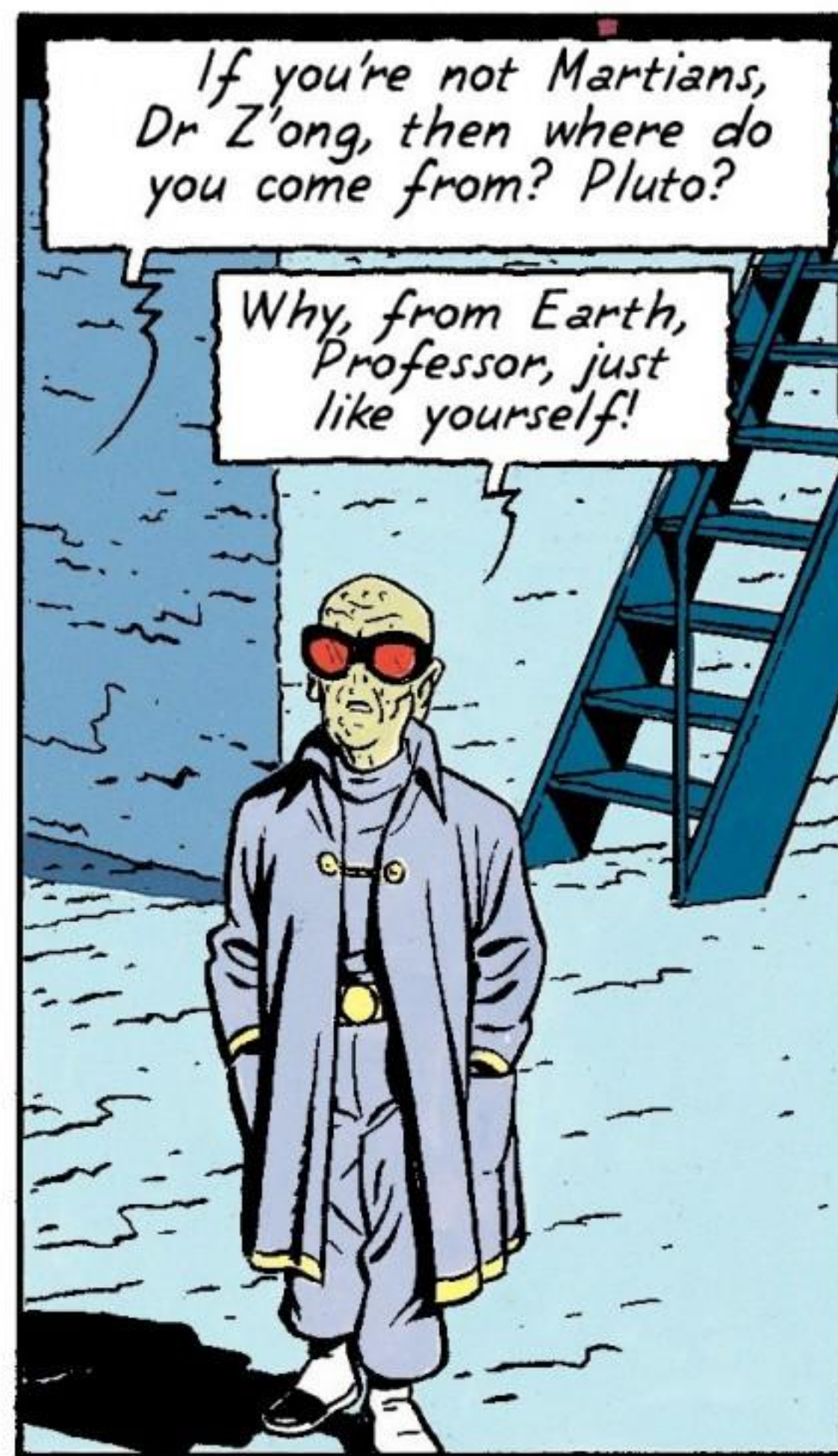
Surprising, isn't it?

That's an understatement. Where was he sent? To the moon or to planet Mars?

Planet Mars!... Ha! Ha! Ha!

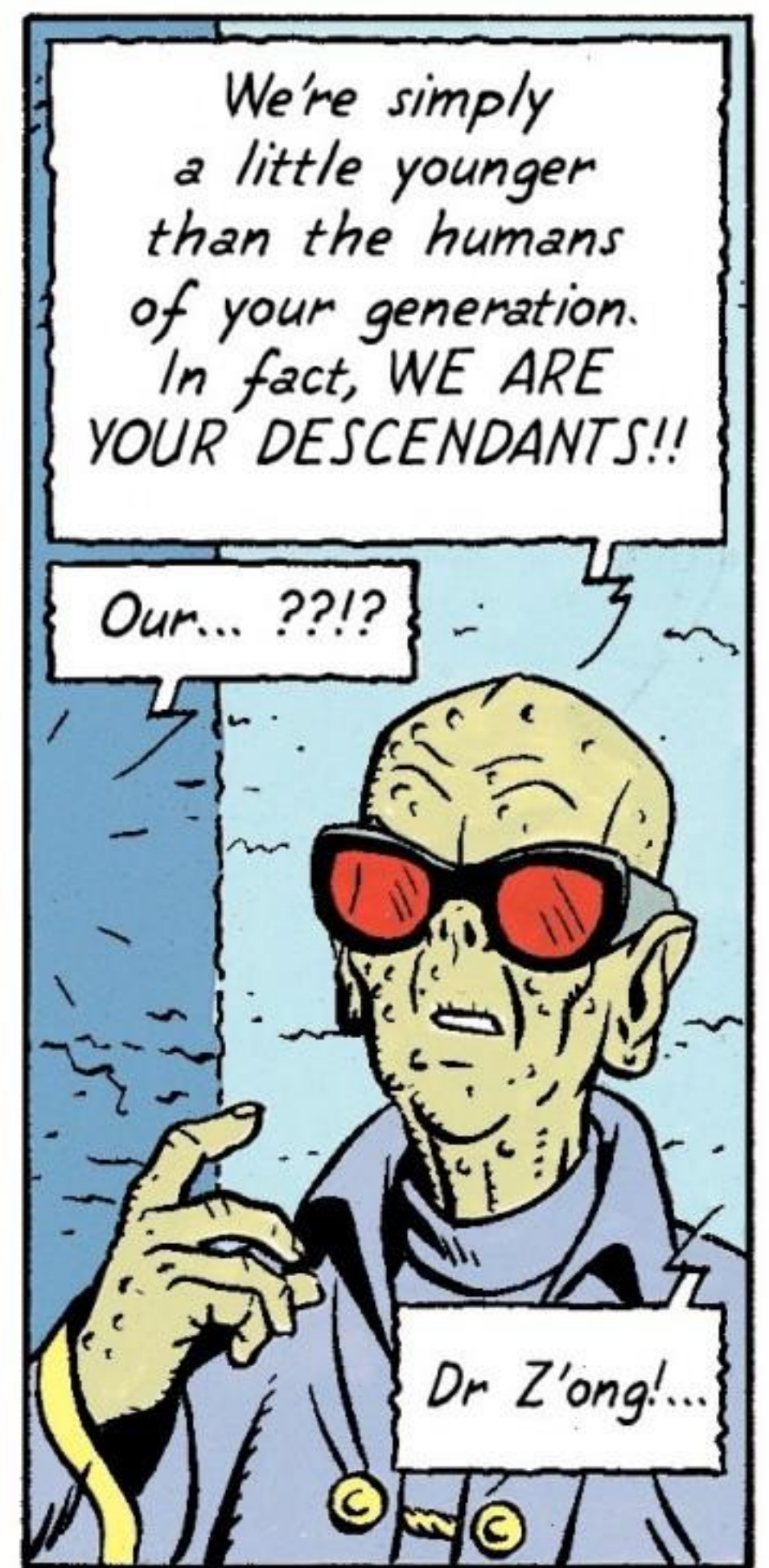


My word, Professor Mortimer, your contemporaries are so incredibly gullible! They see Martians everywhere! Ha! Ha! Ha!



If you're not Martians, Dr Z'ong, then where do you come from? Pluto?

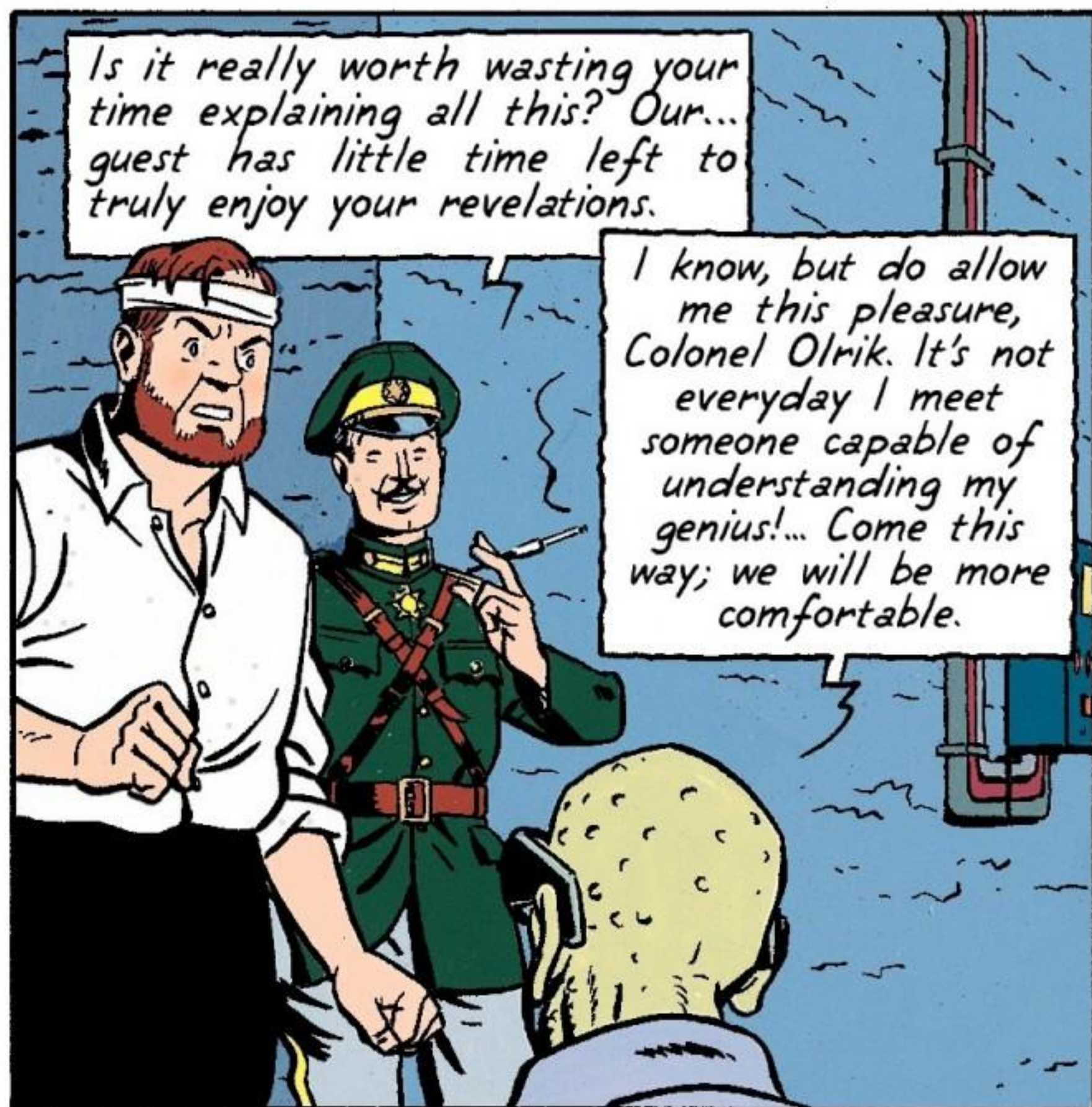
Why, from Earth, Professor, just like yourself!



We're simply a little younger than the humans of your generation. In fact, WE ARE YOUR DESCENDANTS!!

Our... ???!

Dr Z'ong!...



Is it really worth wasting your time explaining all this? Our... guest has little time left to truly enjoy your revelations.

I know, but do allow me this pleasure, Colonel Olrik. It's not everyday I meet someone capable of understanding my genius!... Come this way; we will be more comfortable.



Do you mean that... that you come from the FUTURE??

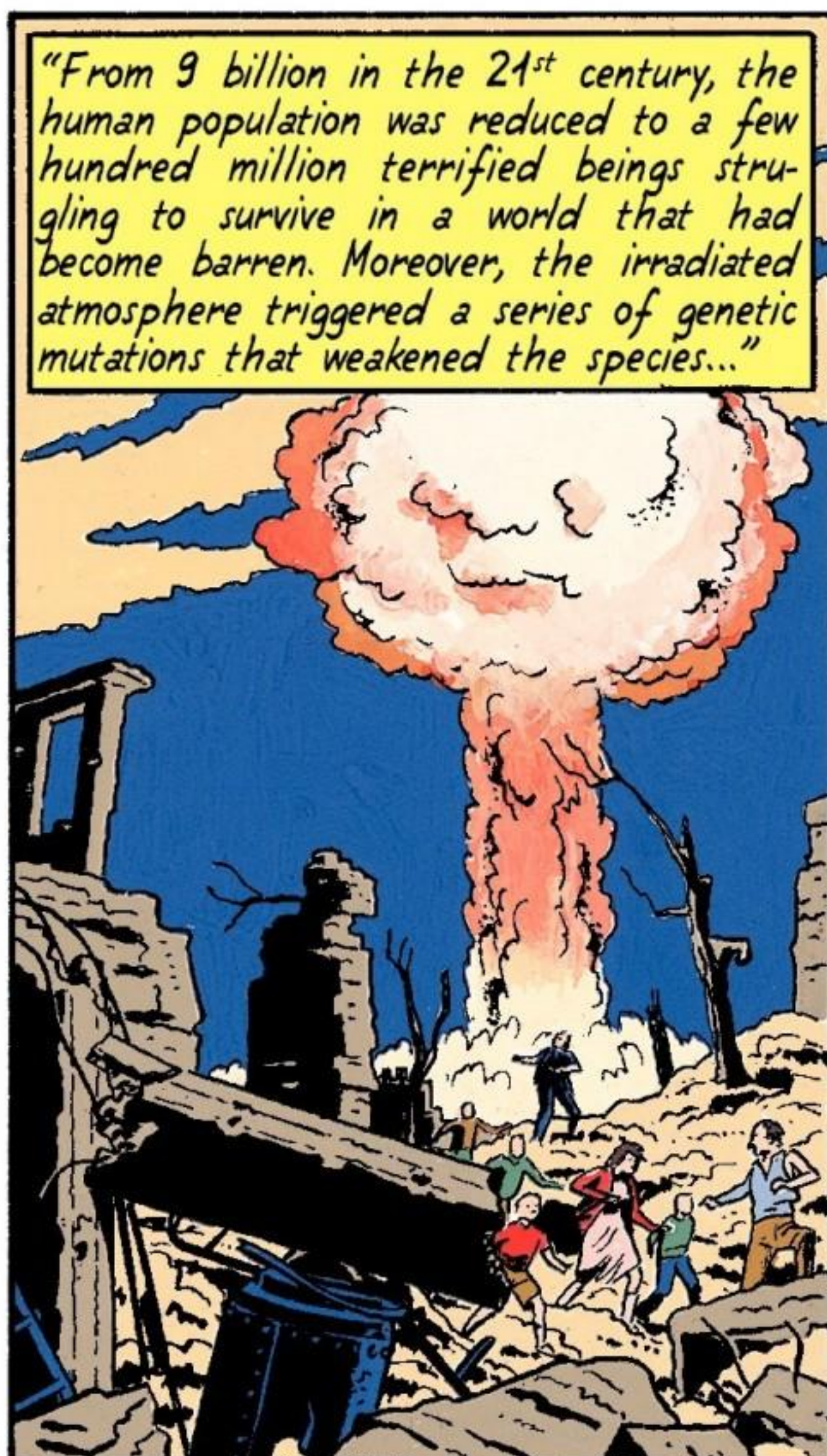
That's it exactly. More precisely, from the 81st century, where I just sent back His Majesty Basam Damdu.



A SHORT WHILE LATER, OUR FRIEND AND HIS CAPTORS FIND THEMSELVES IN A SMALL ROOM BATHED IN ORANGE LIGHT, LISTENING TO THE EXPLANATIONS OF THE STRANGE LITTLE SCIENTIST.

The 81st century!... 8061!... So that was it...

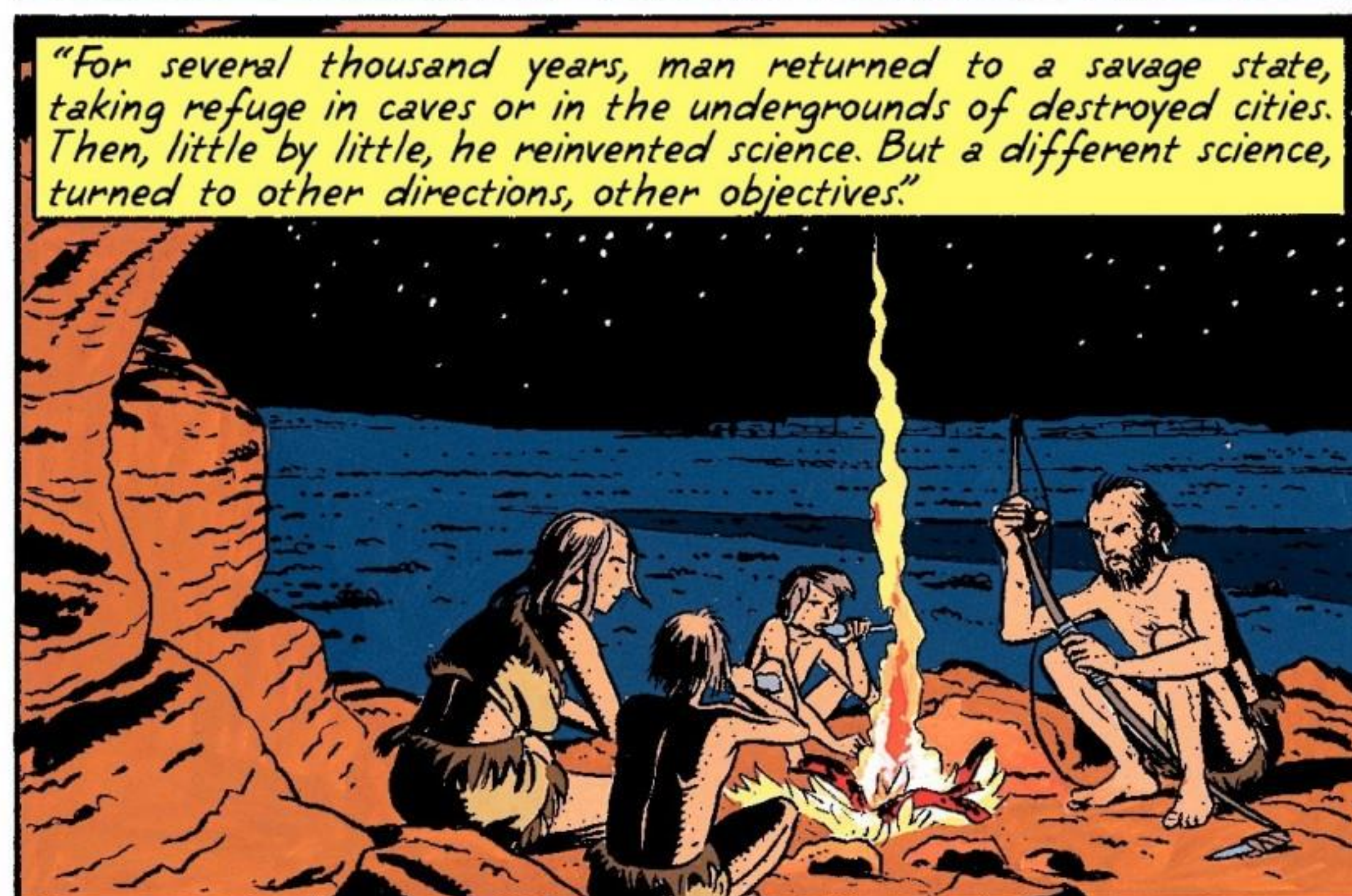
You see, Professor, during the century that followed yours, Earth was ravaged by several nuclear wars that spanned the whole planet...



"From 9 billion in the 21st century, the human population was reduced to a few hundred million terrified beings struggling to survive in a world that had become barren. Moreover, the irradiated atmosphere triggered a series of genetic mutations that weakened the species..."



Look at my face, Professor Mortimer. See what the folly of the people of your time did to their posterity!!!

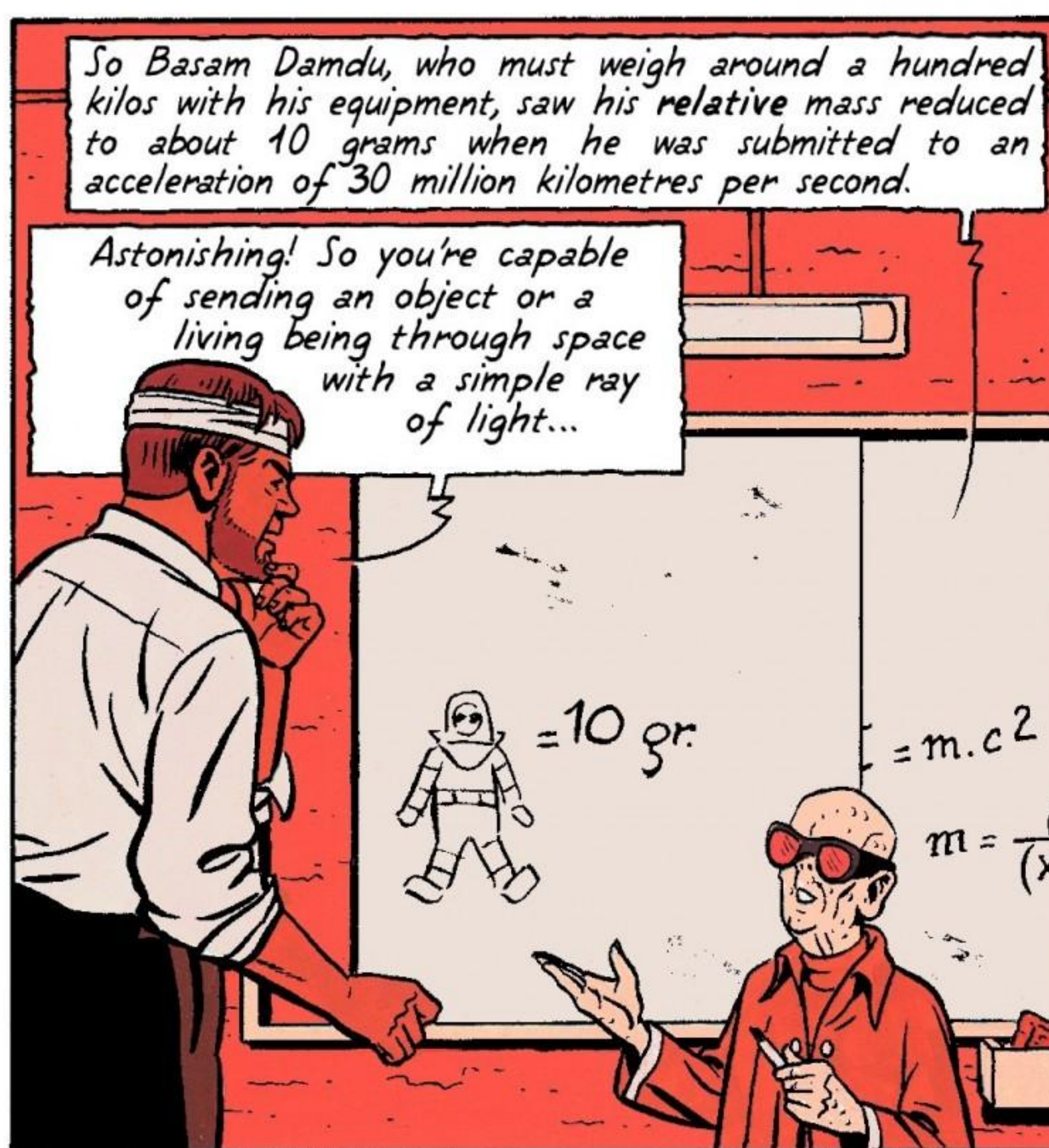
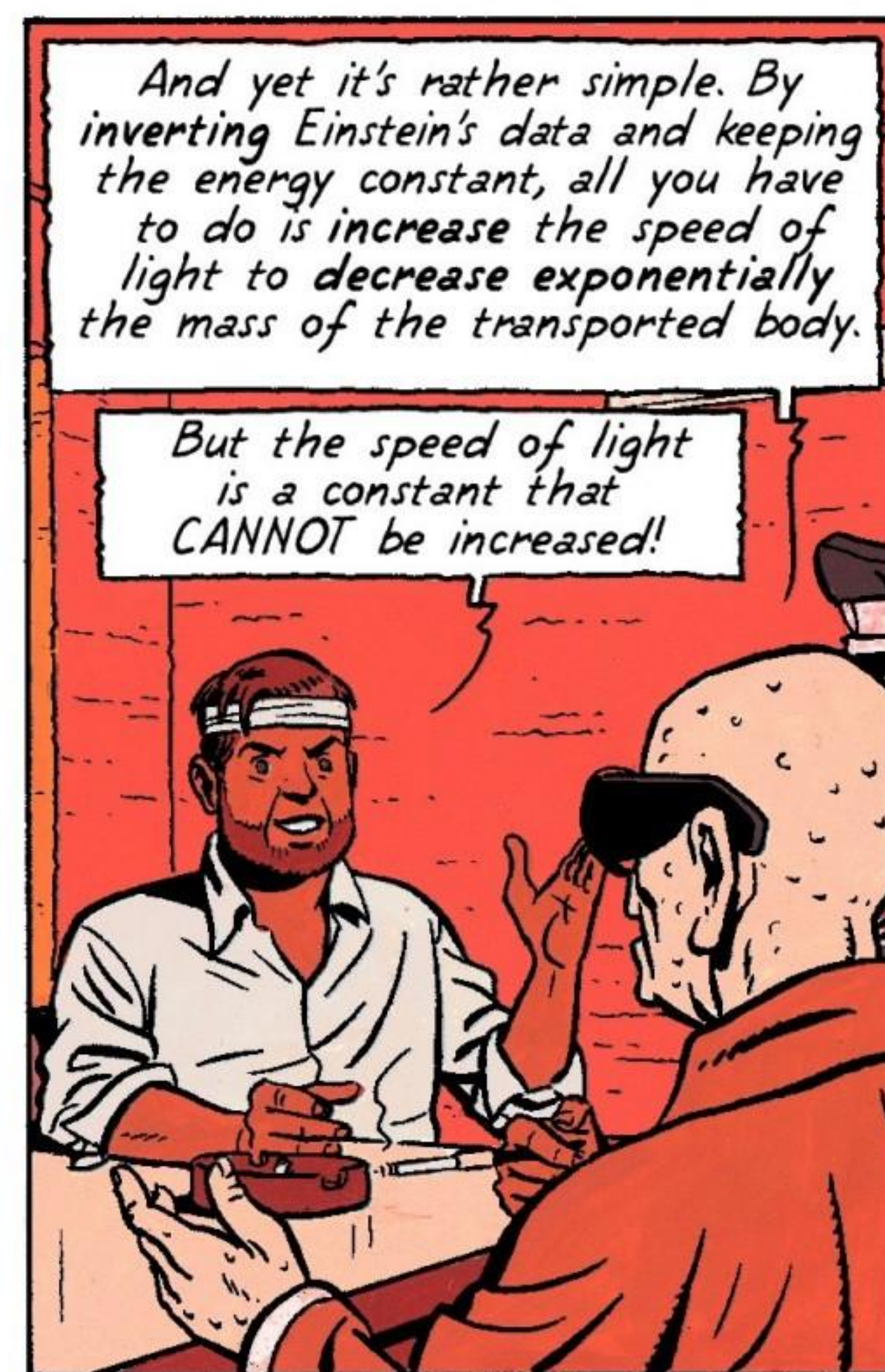
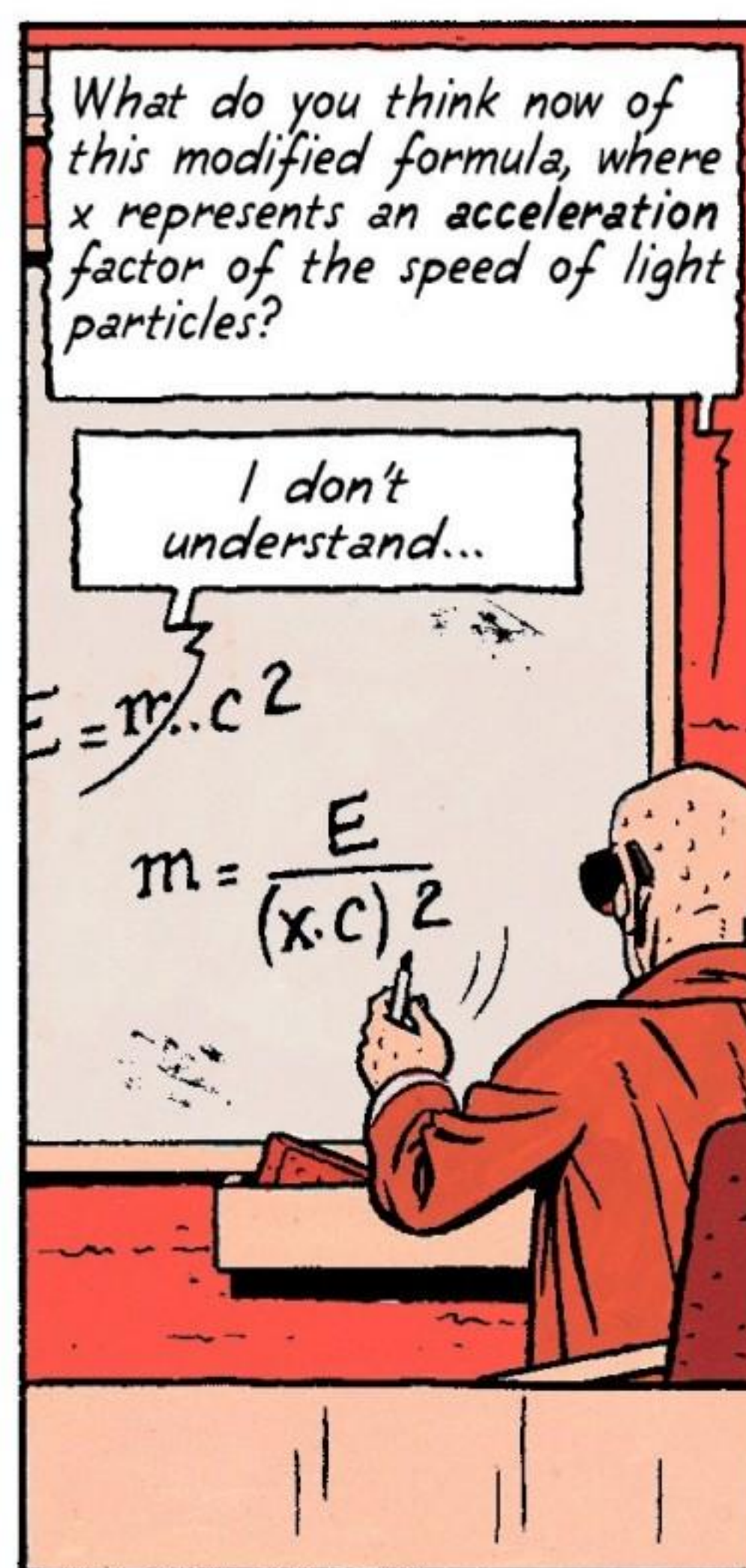
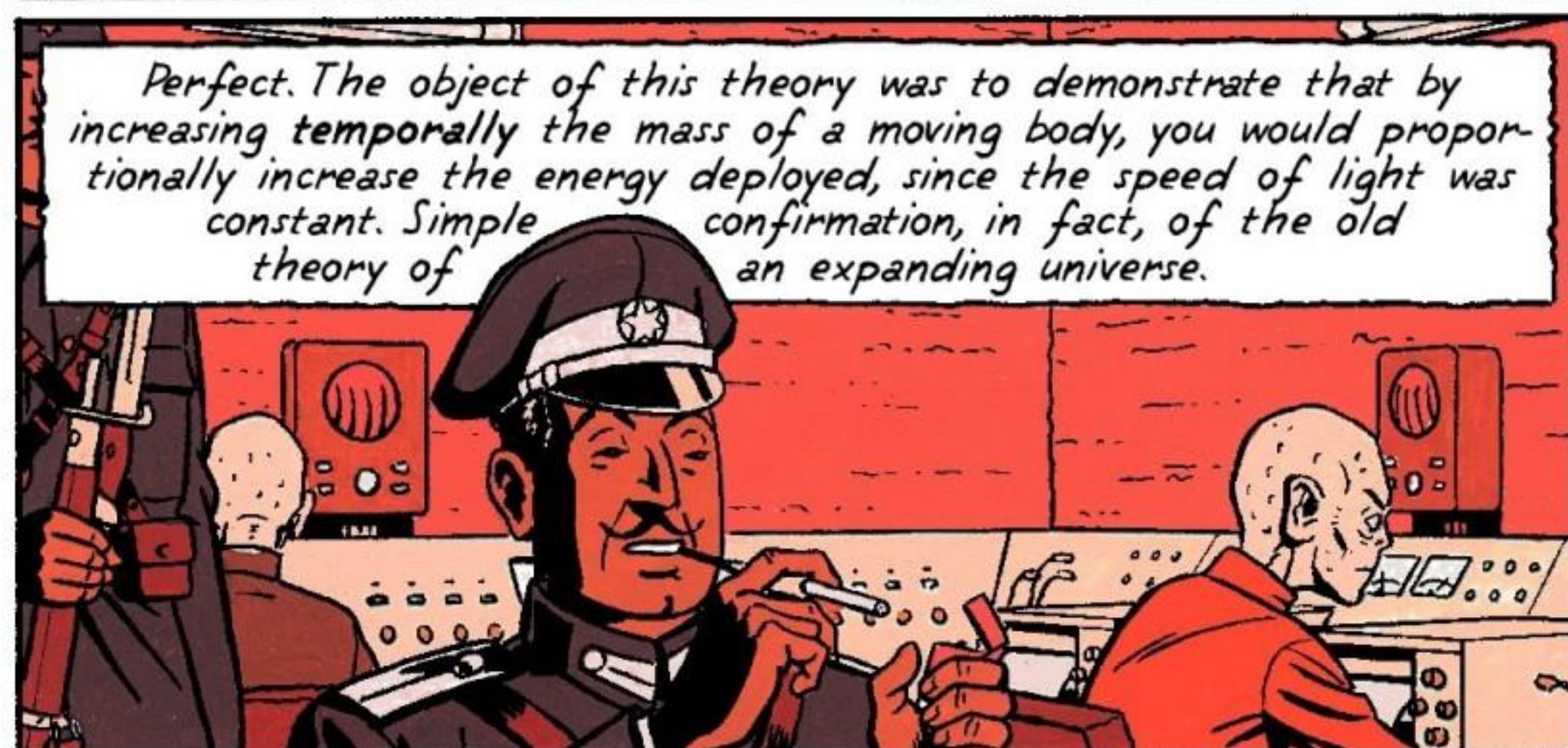
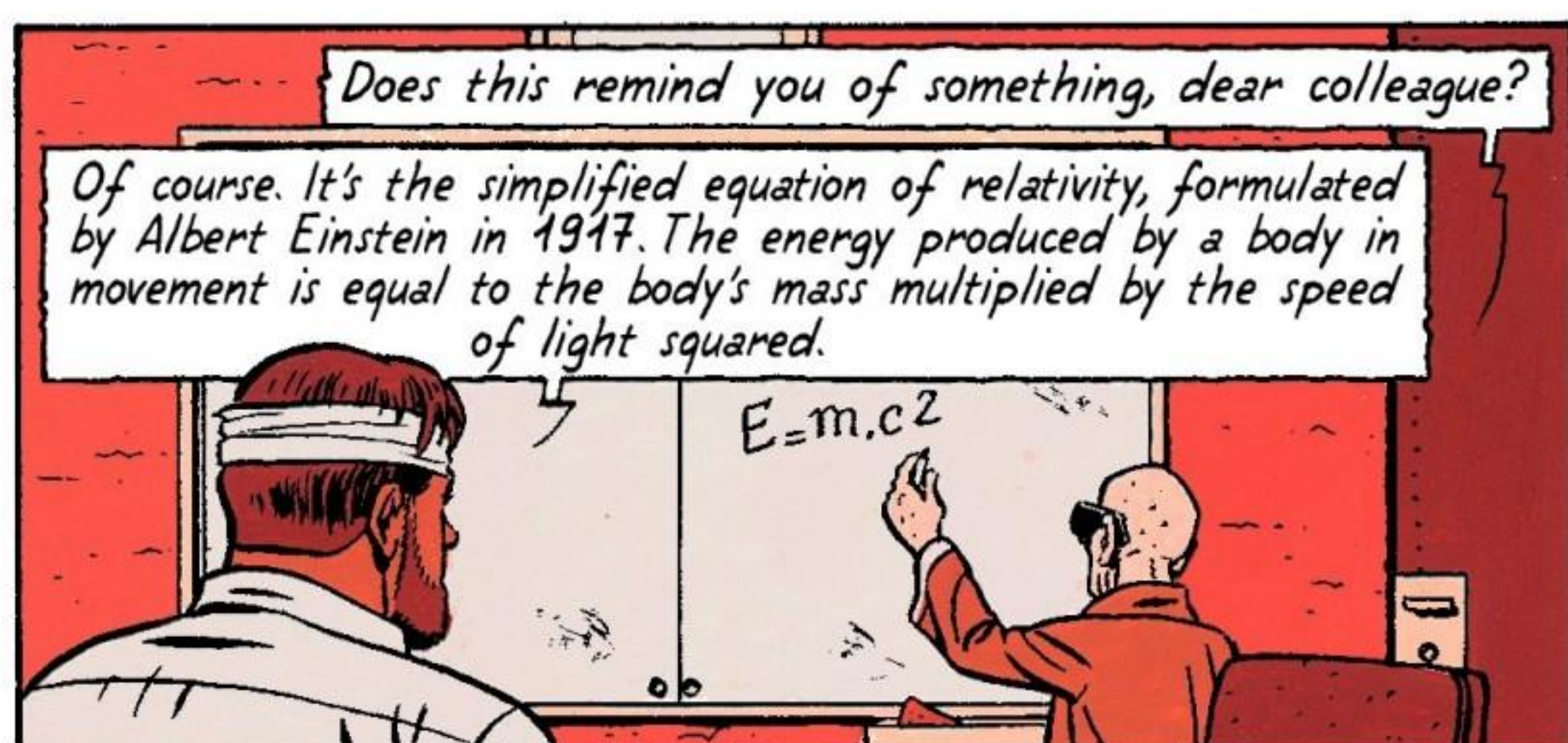
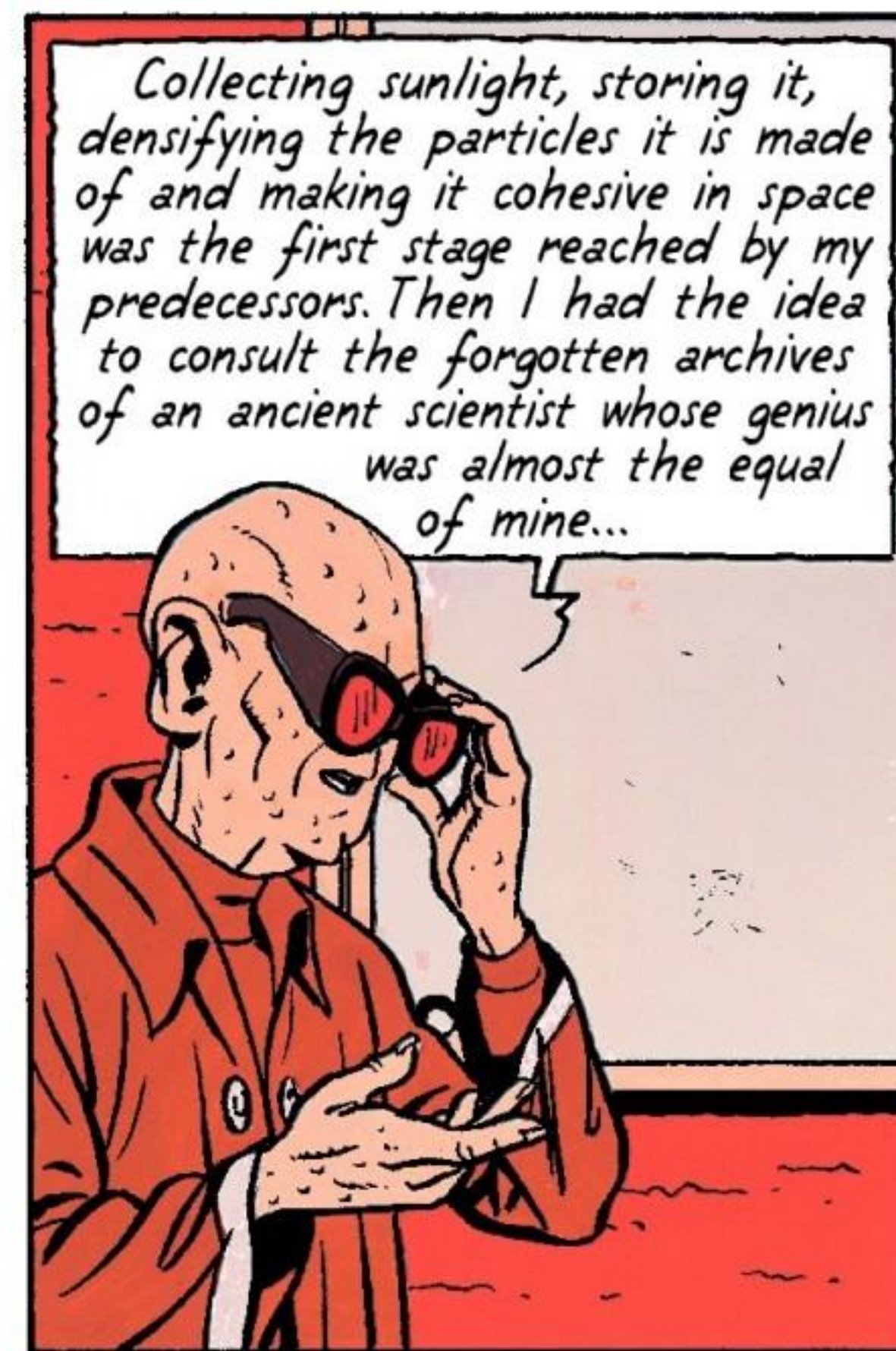
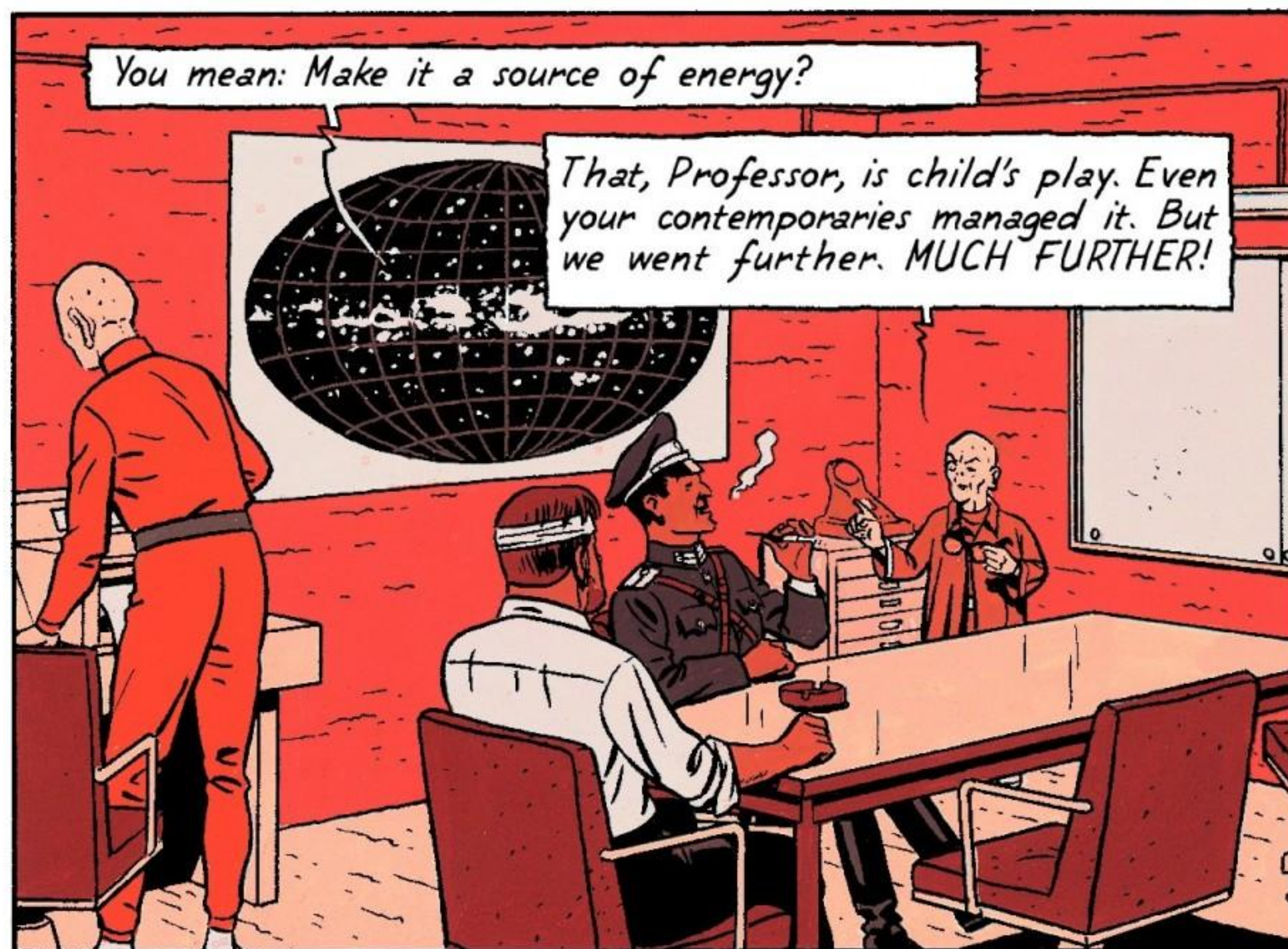


"For several thousand years, man returned to a savage state, taking refuge in caves or in the undergrounds of destroyed cities. Then, little by little, he reinvented science. But a different science, turned to other directions, other objectives."

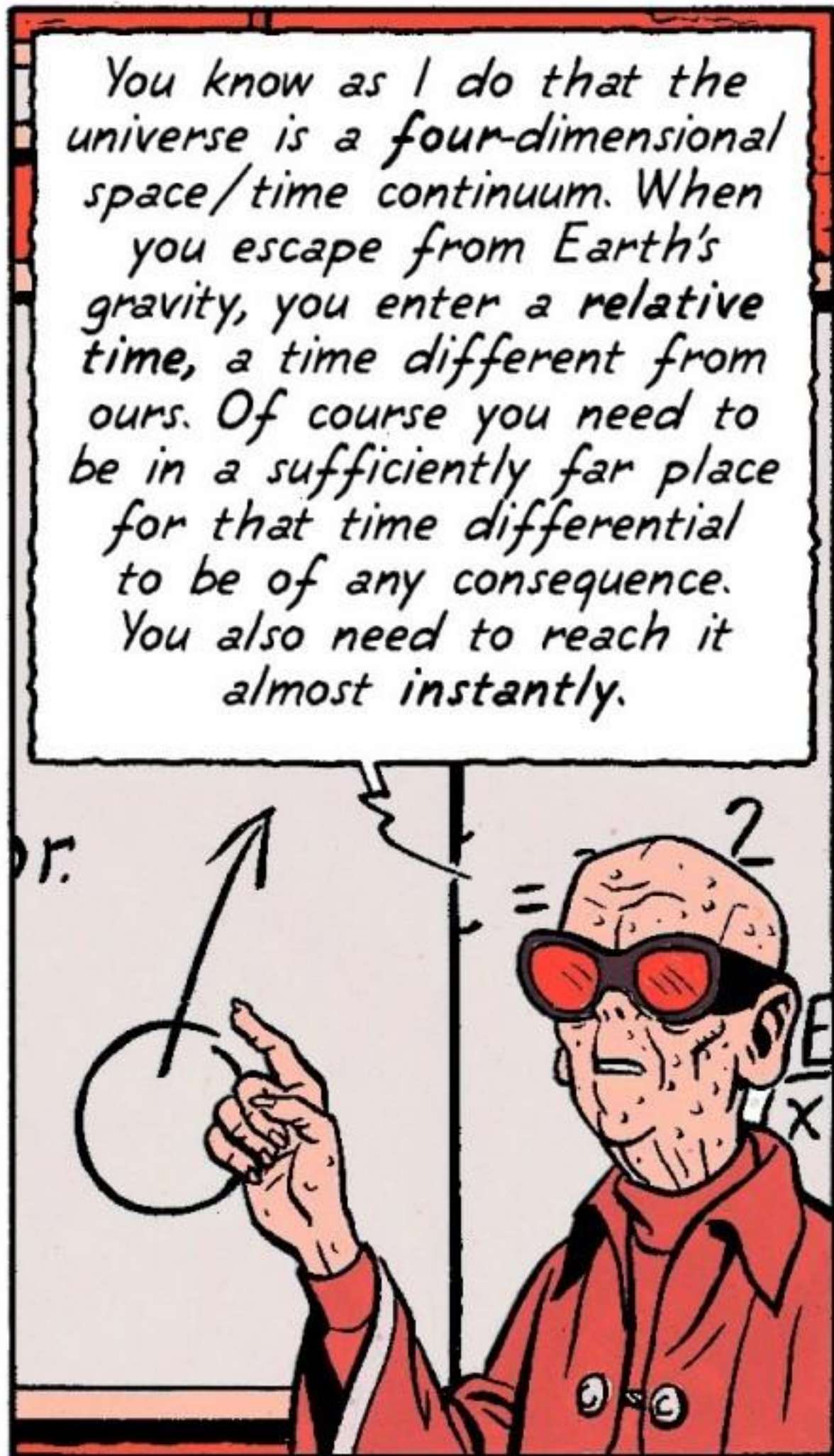


Thus, in the 81st century, the mysteries of the atom remain little known to us, but we have instead achieved MASTERY OVER LIGHT!

??



You know as I do that the universe is a four-dimensional space/time continuum. When you escape from Earth's gravity, you enter a relative time, a time different from ours. Of course you need to be in a sufficiently far place for that time differential to be of any consequence. You also need to reach it almost instantly.



The planets of our solar system are, obviously, much too close to us to fit the conditions. As for the stars, they are instead too far. To reach the closest one, Proxima Centauri, at even a speed of 30 million km/s, would take over two weeks...

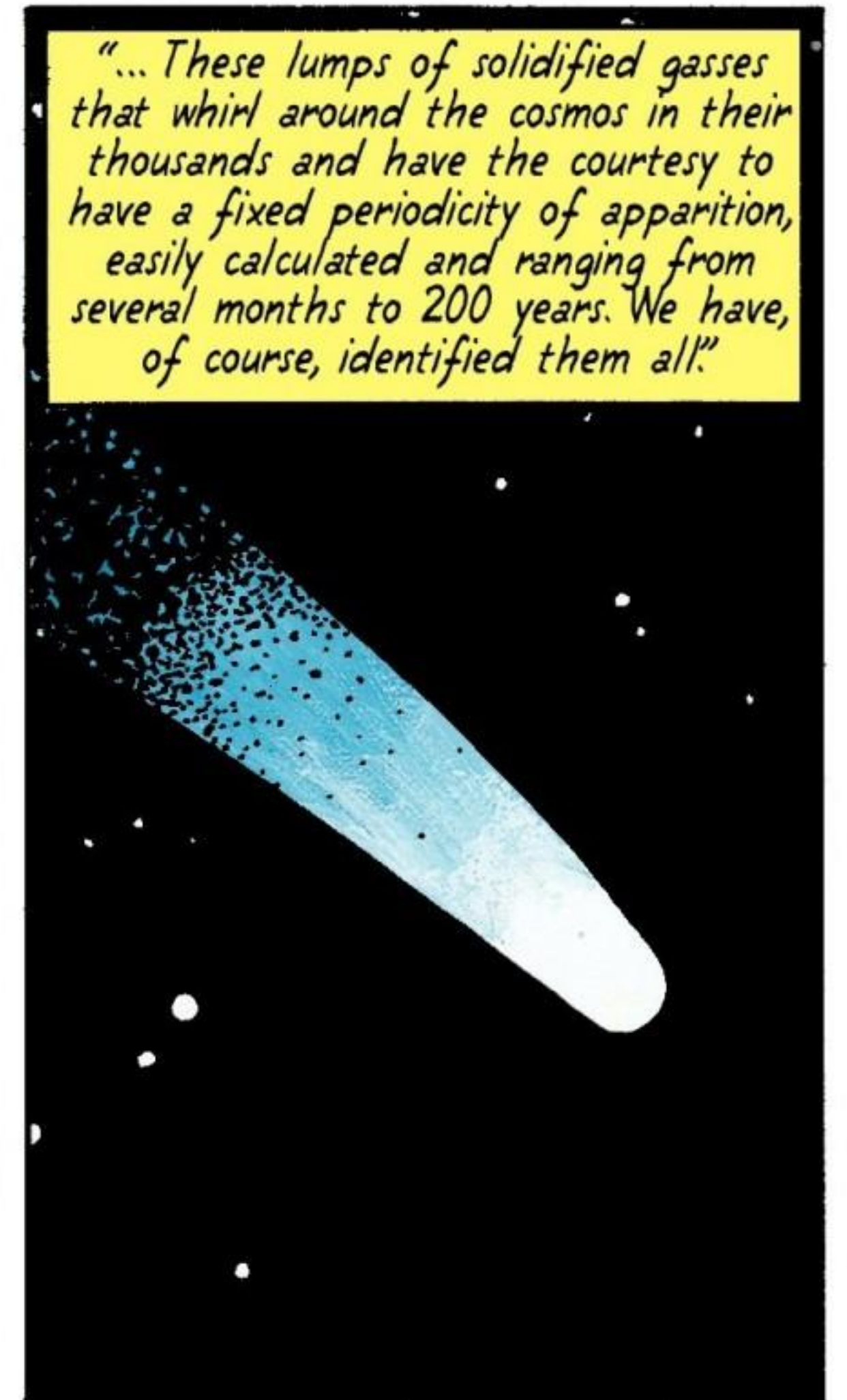
... and as long for the return trip. Even with a protective suit, no one would survive that.

So...?

Comets, my dear colleague: That's the solution!...



"... These lumps of solidified gasses that whirl around the cosmos in their thousands and have the courtesy to have a fixed periodicity of apparition, easily calculated and ranging from several months to 200 years. We have, of course, identified them all."

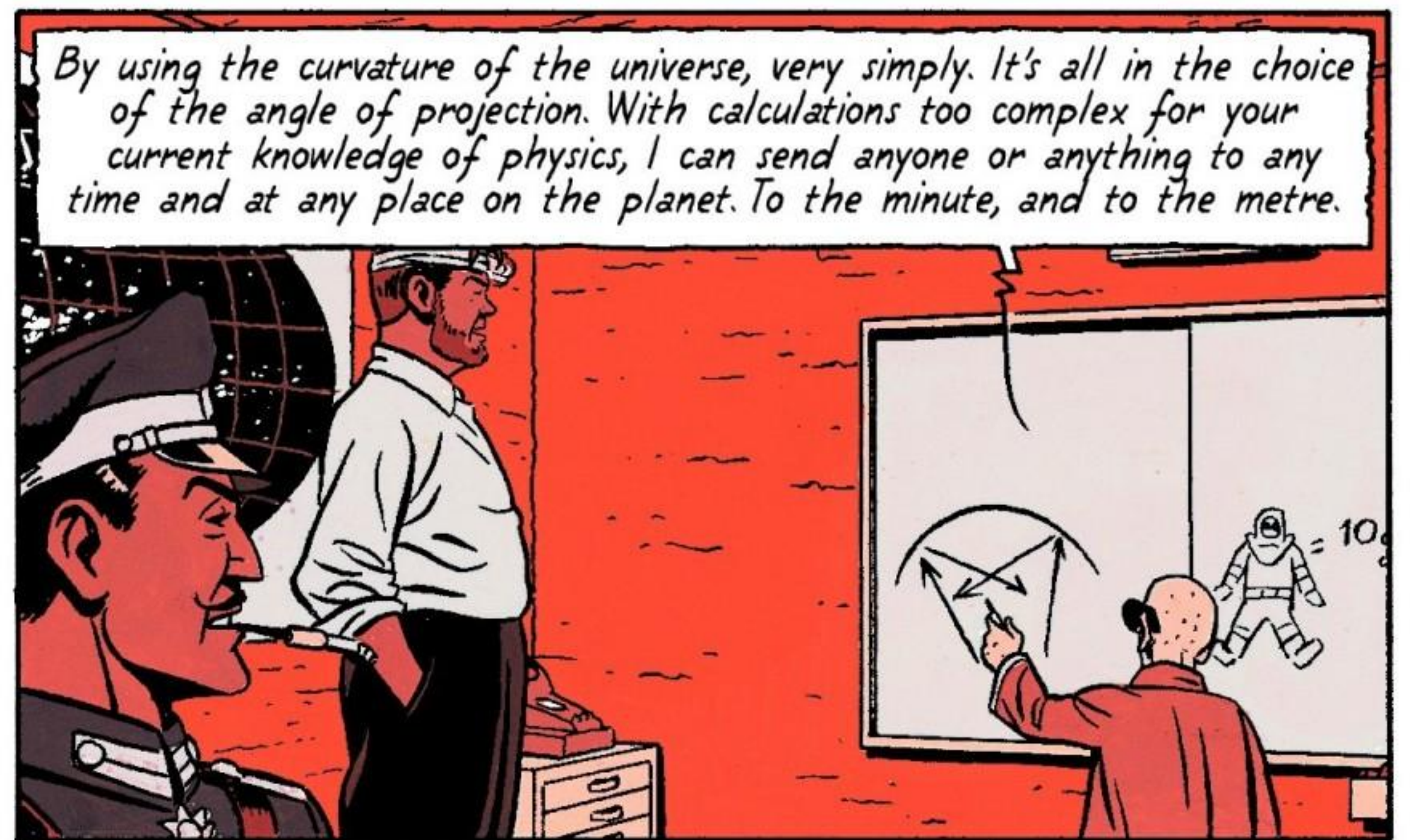


Depending on how far we want to go in time, we bounce our carrier beam on a comet at an appropriate distance. The "trip" lasts only, at worst, about 10 minutes.

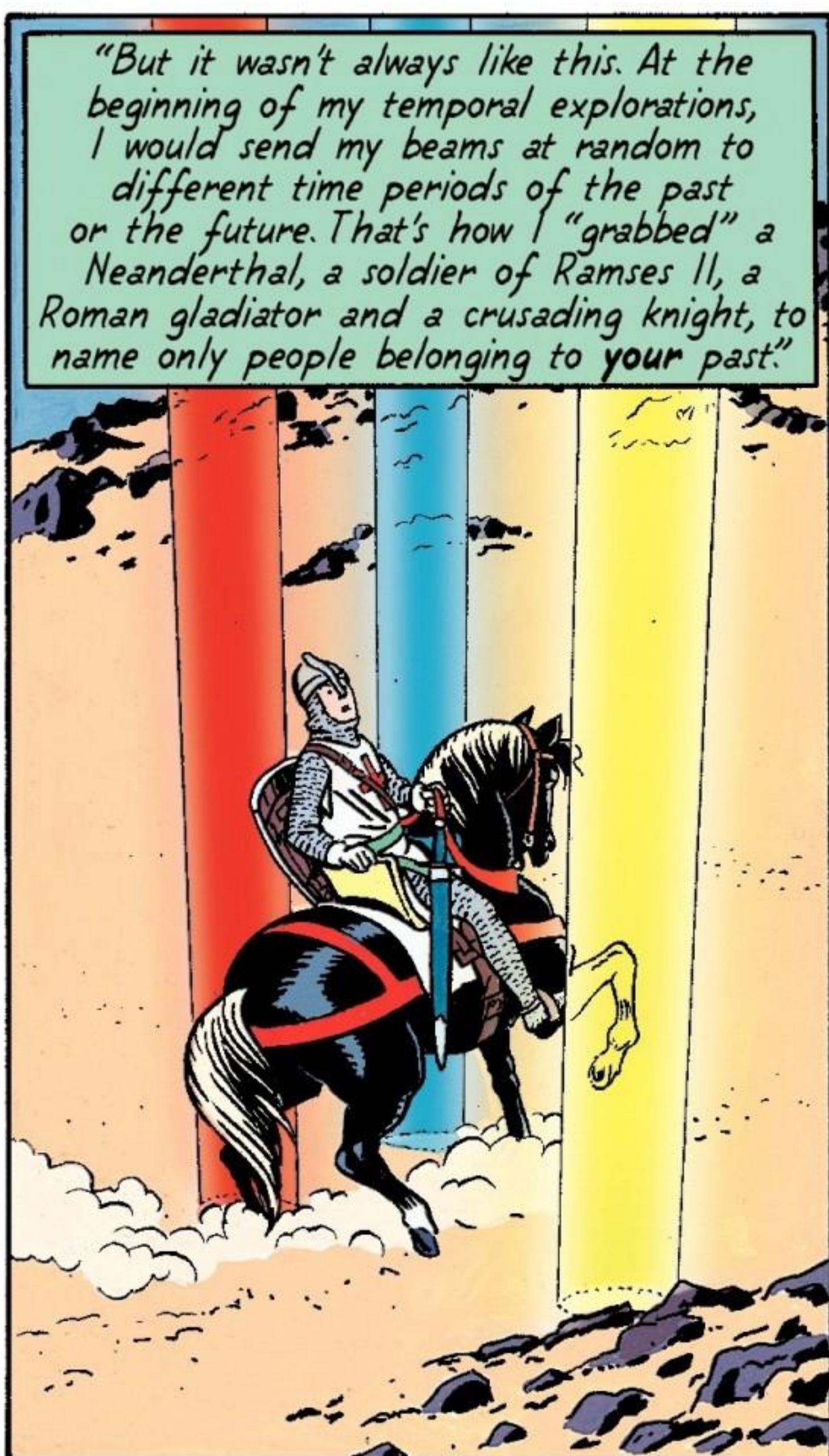
Extraordinary. But how do you choose between past and future?



By using the curvature of the universe, very simply. It's all in the choice of the angle of projection. With calculations too complex for your current knowledge of physics, I can send anyone or anything to any time and at any place on the planet. To the minute, and to the metre.

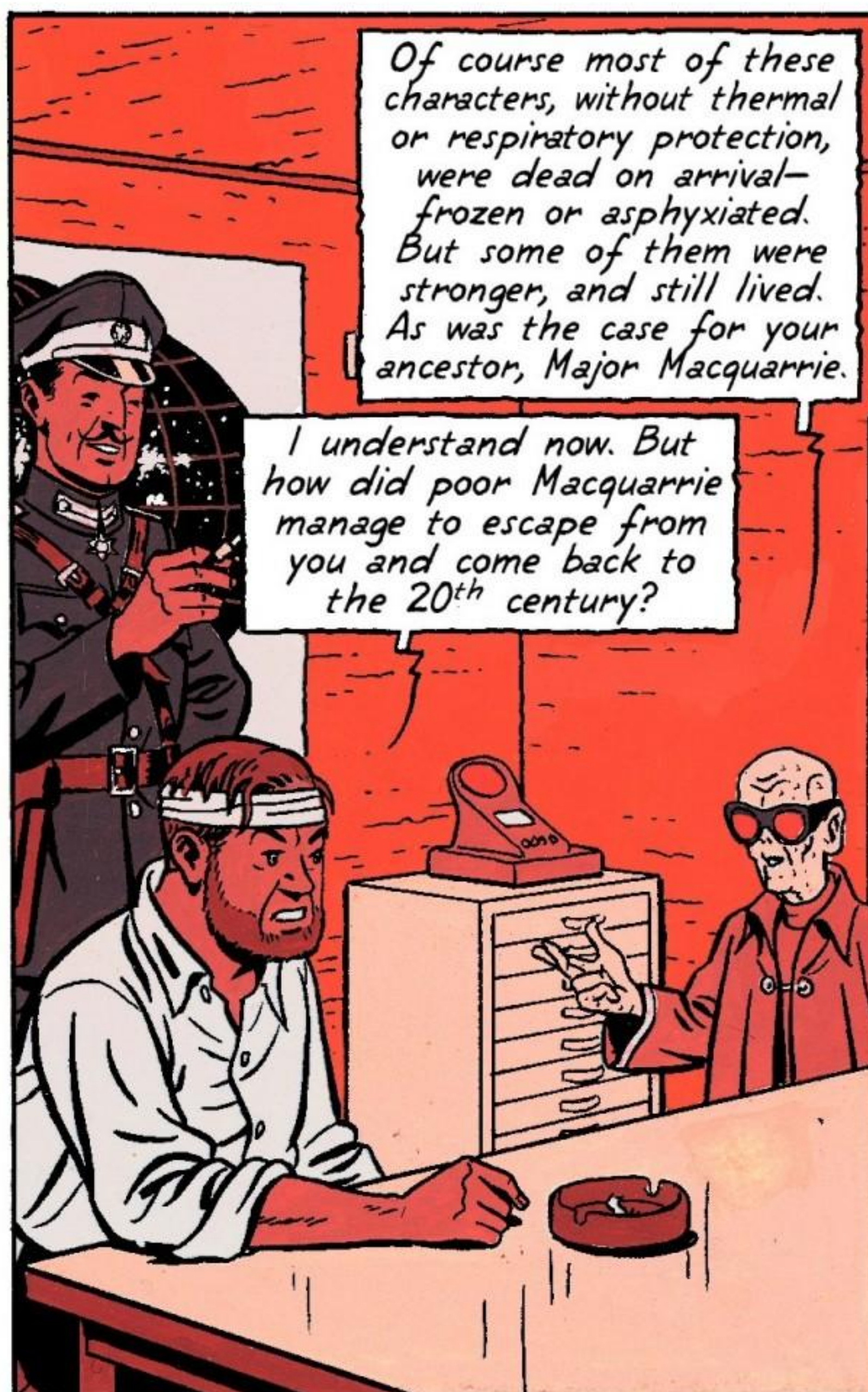


"But it wasn't always like this. At the beginning of my temporal explorations, I would send my beams at random to different time periods of the past or the future. That's how I "grabbed" a Neanderthal, a soldier of Ramses II, a Roman gladiator and a crusading knight, to name only people belonging to your past."

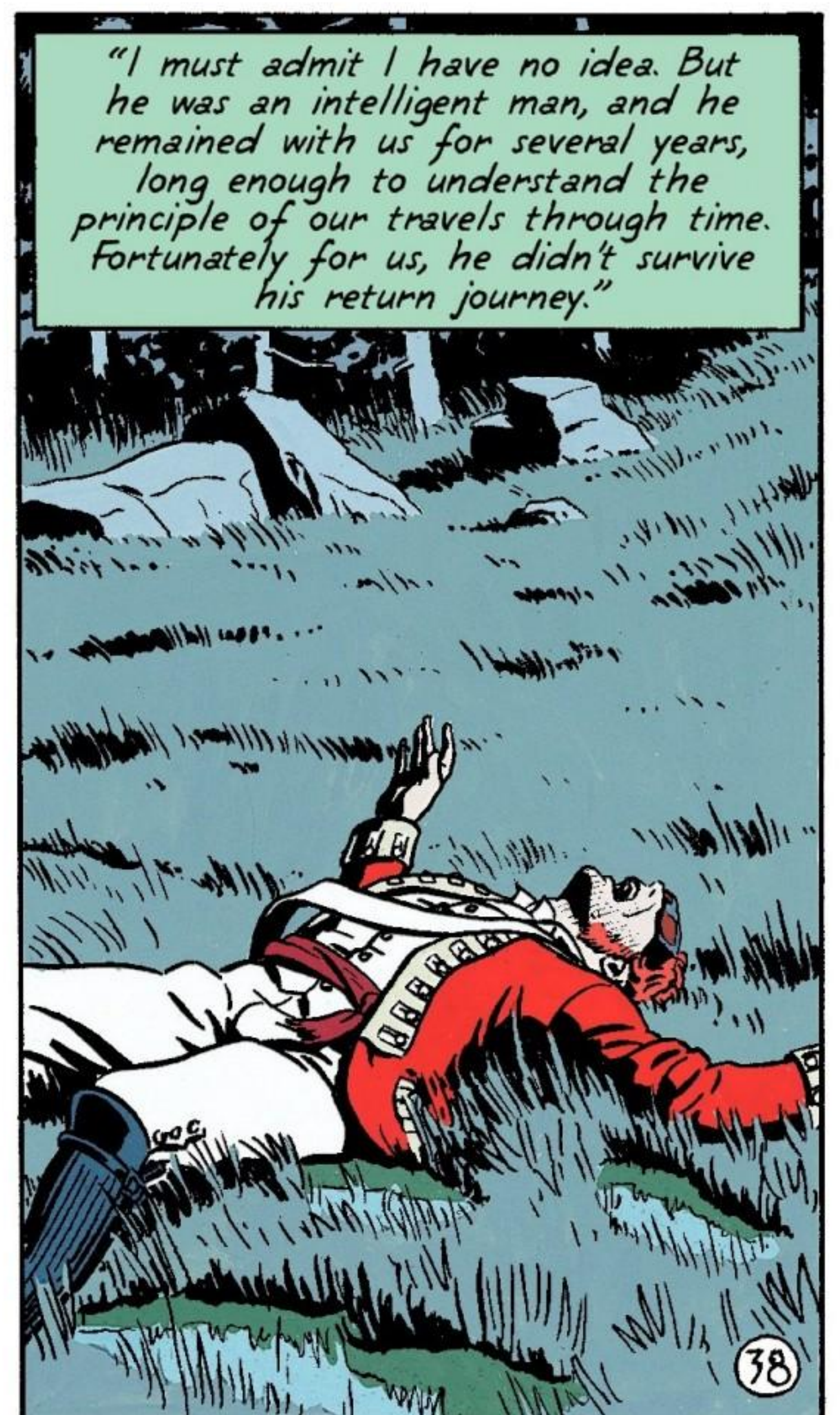


Of course most of these characters, without thermal or respiratory protection, were dead on arrival—frozen or asphyxiated. But some of them were stronger, and still lived. As was the case for your ancestor, Major Macquarrie.

I understand now. But how did poor Macquarrie manage to escape from you and come back to the 20th century?



"I must admit I have no idea. But he was an intelligent man, and he remained with us for several years, long enough to understand the principle of our travels through time. Fortunately for us, he didn't survive his return journey."

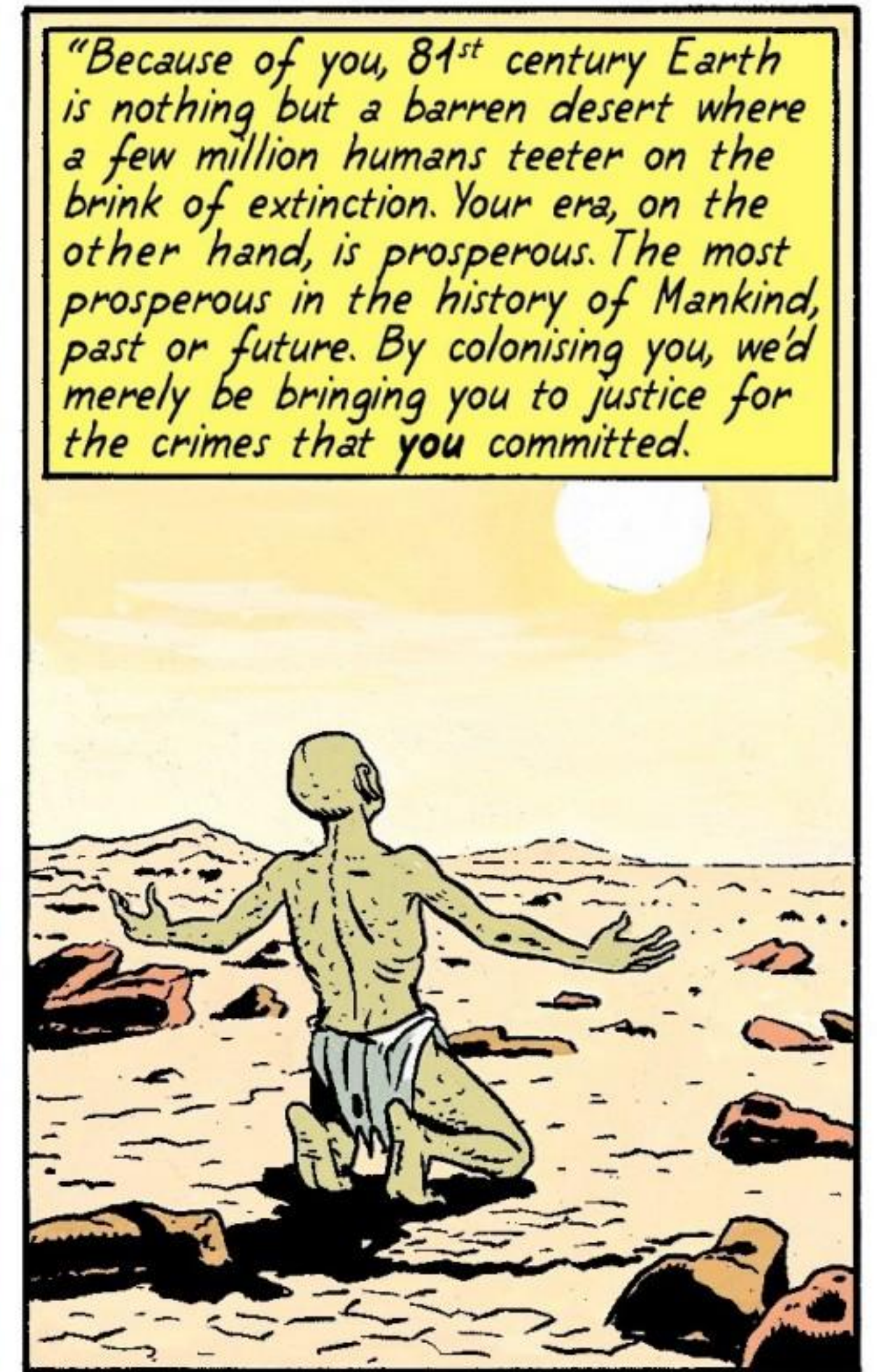




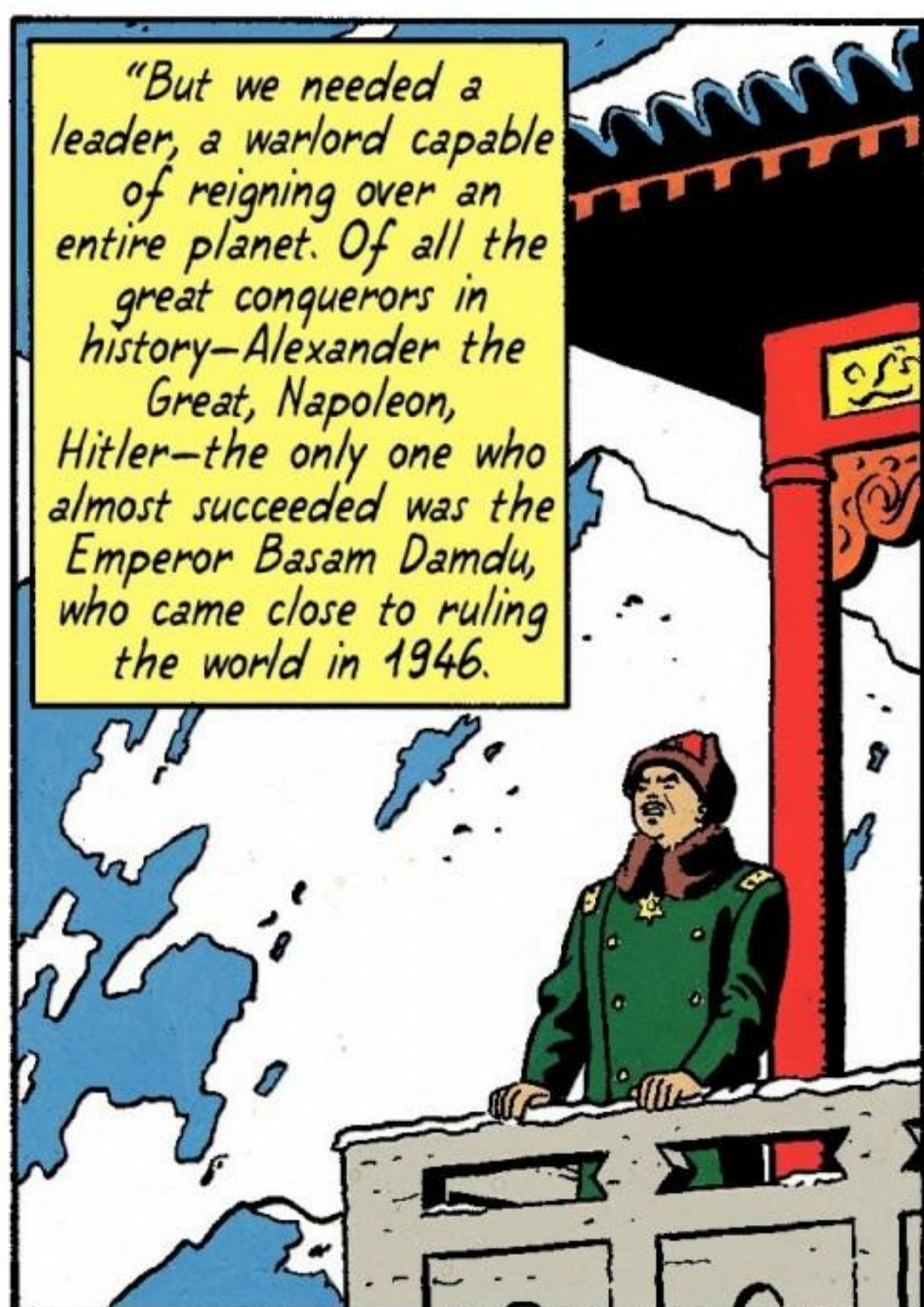
Why "fortunately," Dr Z'ong? Why do you consider us your enemies? Why the secrecy, these uniforms? What are you planning with this tyrant Basam Damdu? You want to invade Earth, is that it? Our Earth?



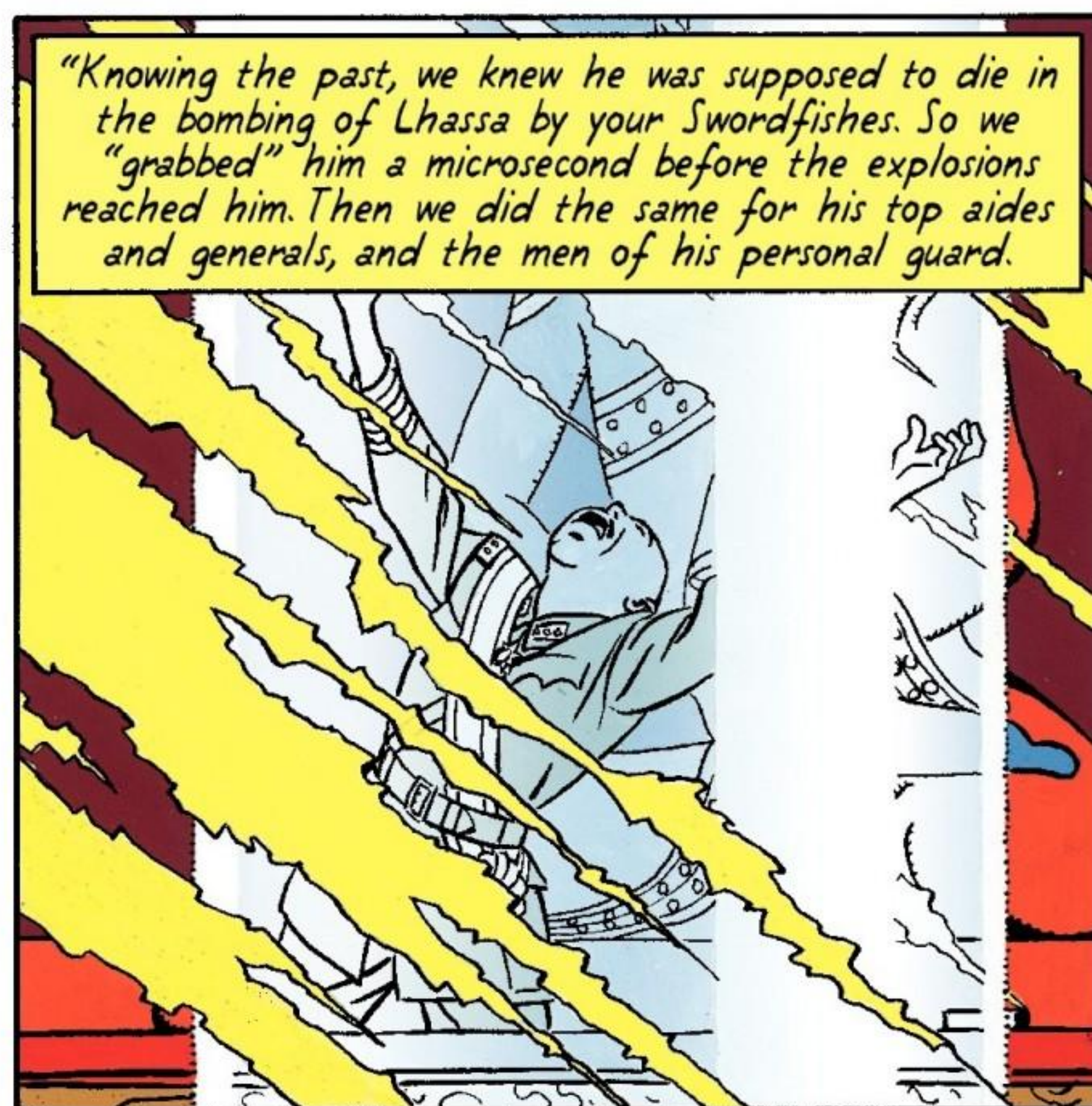
Precisely, Professor Mortimer. Because you did not give us any choice. You, the scientists of the 20th and 21st centuries, who allowed the madmen who govern you to wage all-out chemical and nuclear wars.



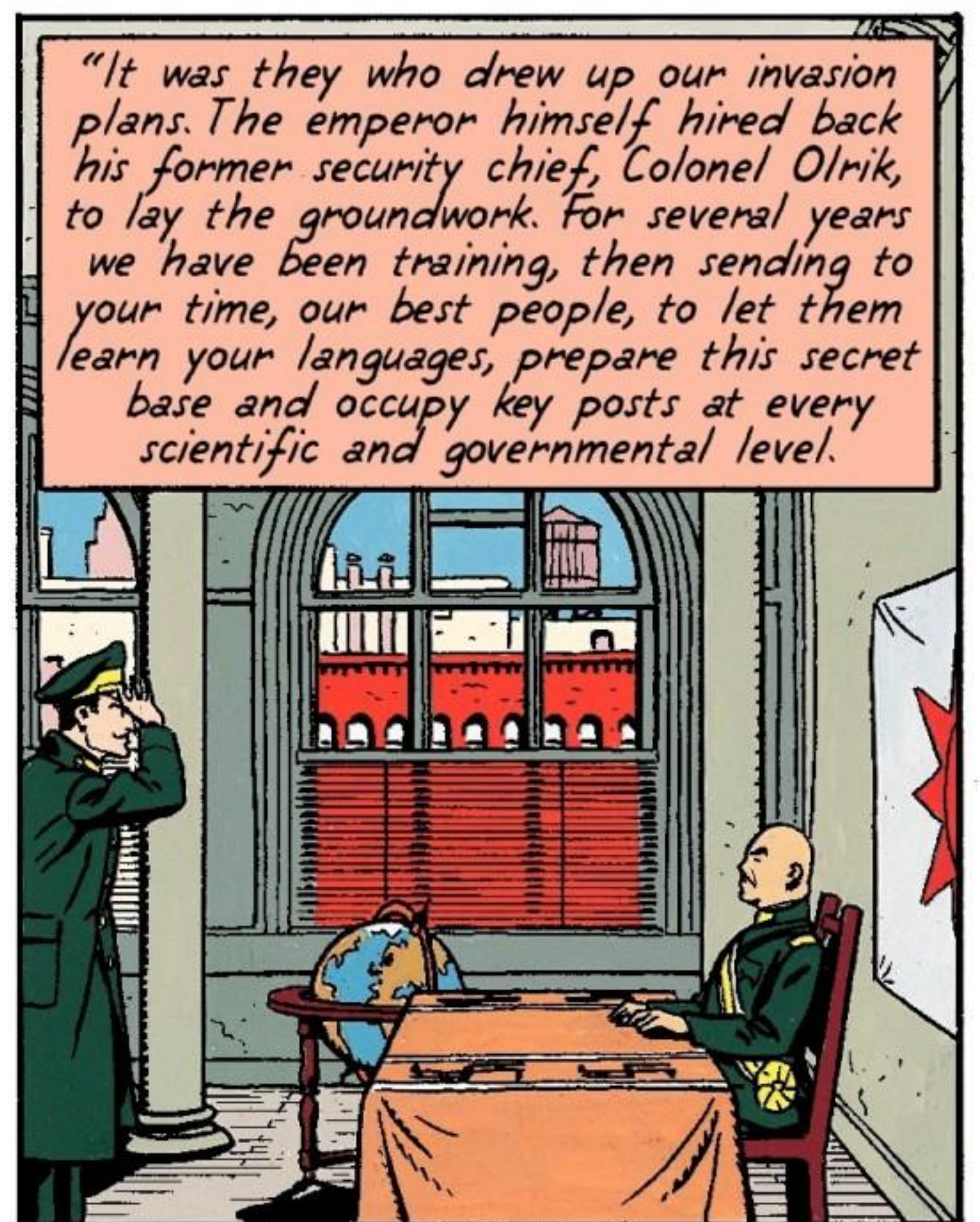
"Because of you, 81st century Earth is nothing but a barren desert where a few million humans teeter on the brink of extinction. Your era, on the other hand, is prosperous. The most prosperous in the history of Mankind, past or future. By colonising you, we'd merely be bringing you to justice for the crimes that you committed.



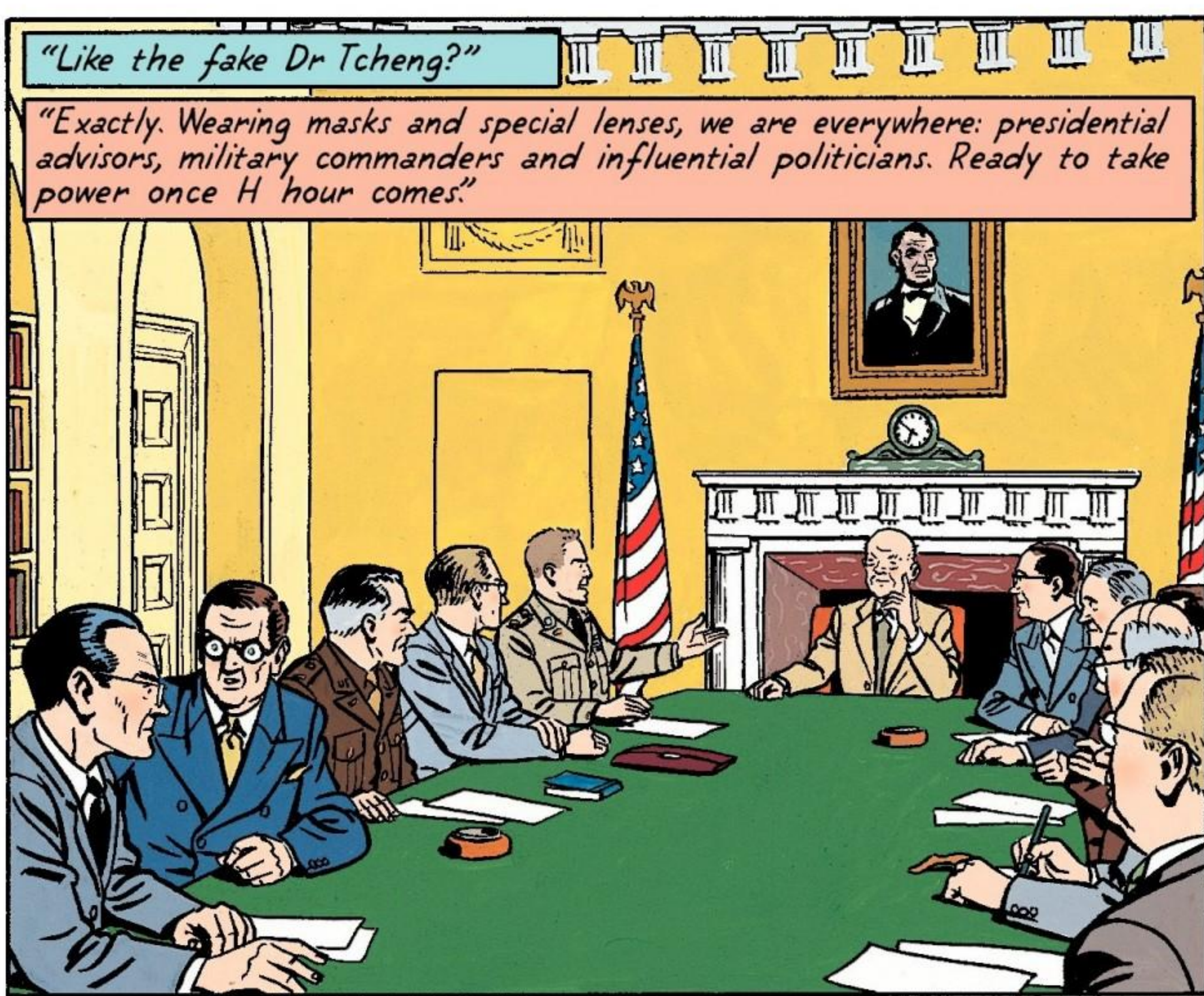
"But we needed a leader, a warlord capable of reigning over an entire planet. Of all the great conquerors in history—Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler—the only one who almost succeeded was the Emperor Basam Damdu, who came close to ruling the world in 1946.



"Knowing the past, we knew he was supposed to die in the bombing of Lhasa by your Swordfishes. So we "grabbed" him a microsecond before the explosions reached him. Then we did the same for his top aides and generals, and the men of his personal guard.

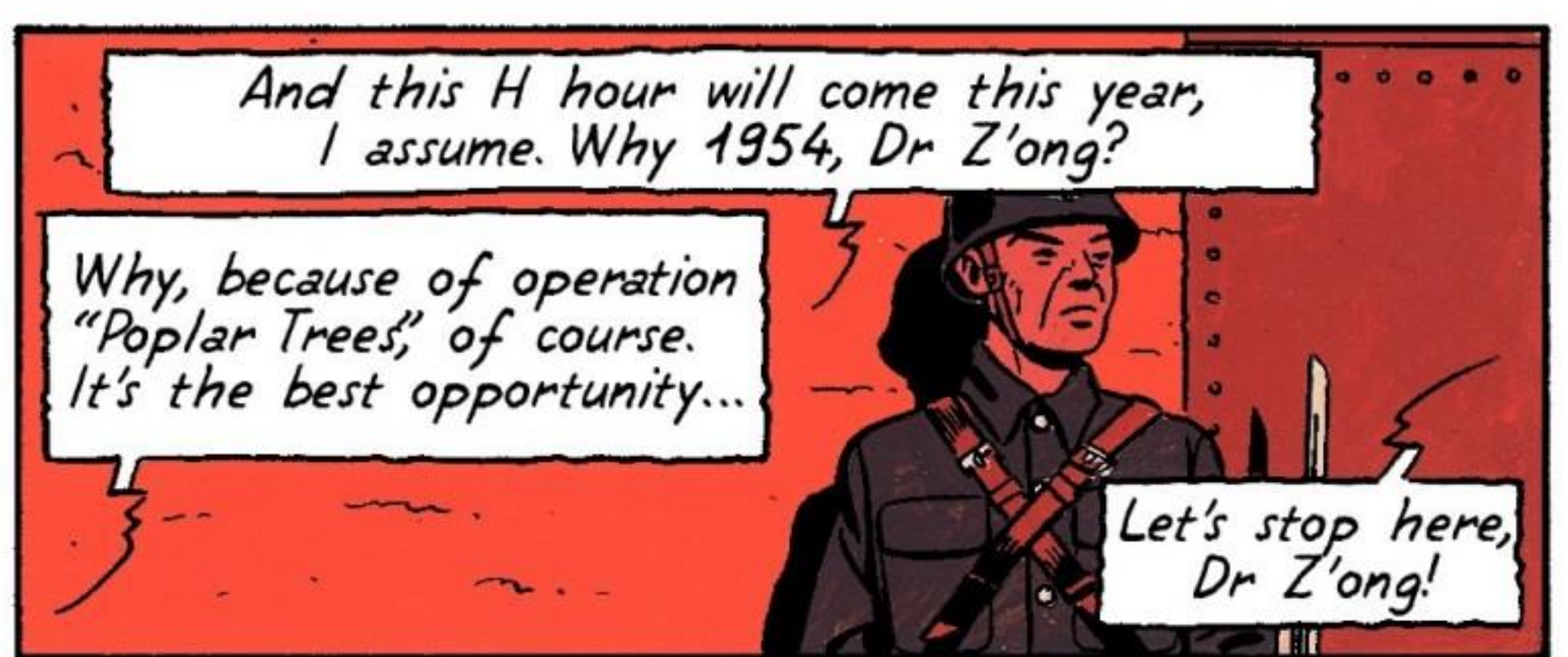


"It was they who drew up our invasion plans. The emperor himself hired back his former security chief, Colonel Olrik, to lay the groundwork. For several years we have been training, then sending to your time, our best people, to let them learn your languages, prepare this secret base and occupy key posts at every scientific and governmental level.



"Like the fake Dr Tcheng?"

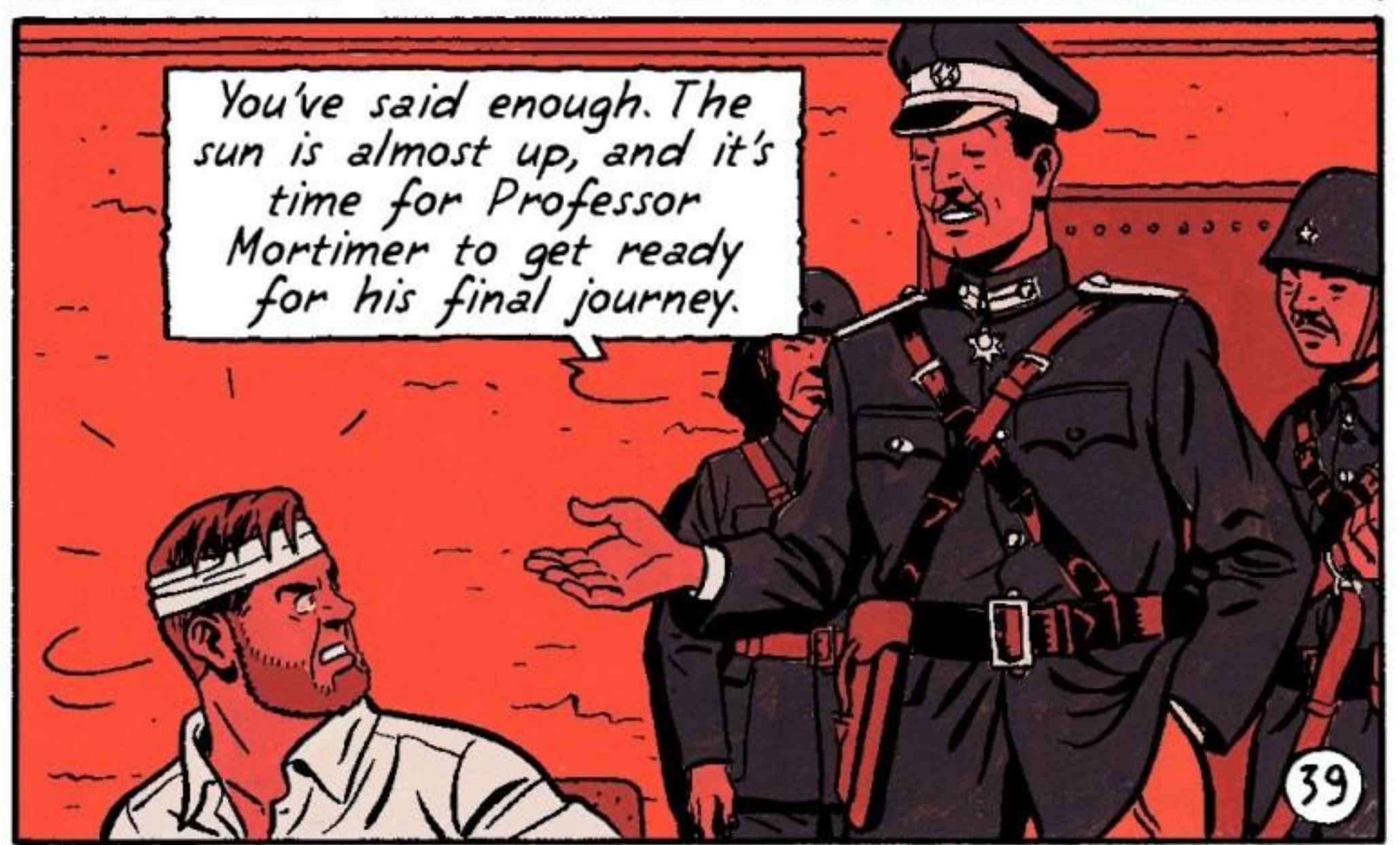
"Exactly. Wearing masks and special lenses, we are everywhere: presidential advisors, military commanders and influential politicians. Ready to take power once H hour comes."



And this H hour will come this year, I assume. Why 1954, Dr Z'ong?

Why, because of operation "Poplar Trees," of course. It's the best opportunity...

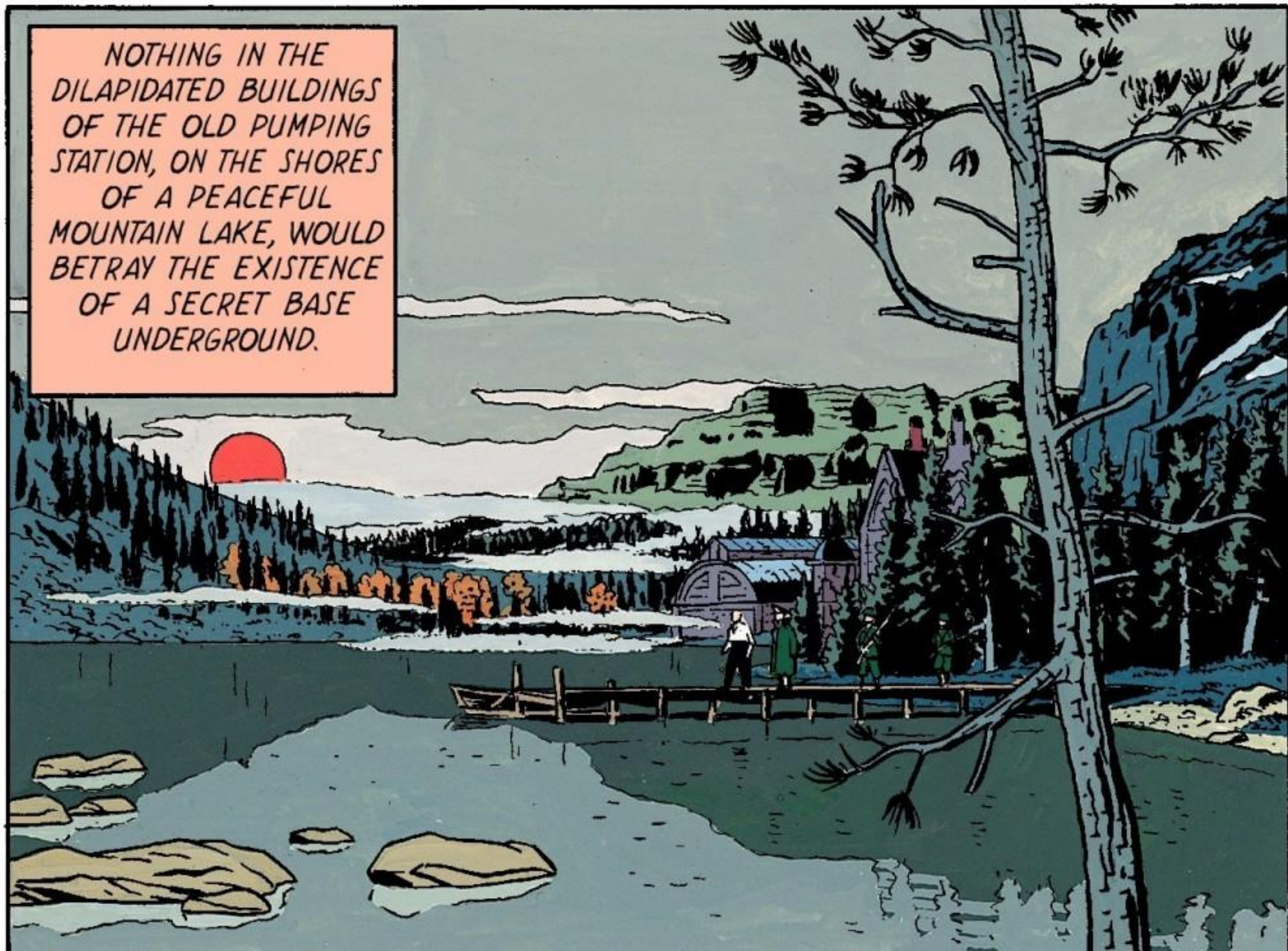
Let's stop here, Dr Z'ong!



You've said enough. The sun is almost up, and it's time for Professor Mortimer to get ready for his final journey.

LESS THAN 15 MINUTES LATER, OLRİK AND MORTIMER, THE LATTER CAREFULLY WATCHED BY TWO ARMED GUARDS, COME UP INTO THE OPEN AIR IN THE PALE LIGHT OF EARLY DAWN.

NOTHING IN THE DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS OF THE OLD PUMPING STATION, ON THE SHORES OF A PEACEFUL MOUNTAIN LAKE, WOULD BETRAY THE EXISTENCE OF A SECRET BASE UNDERGROUND.



Time for the last cigarette, Professor.

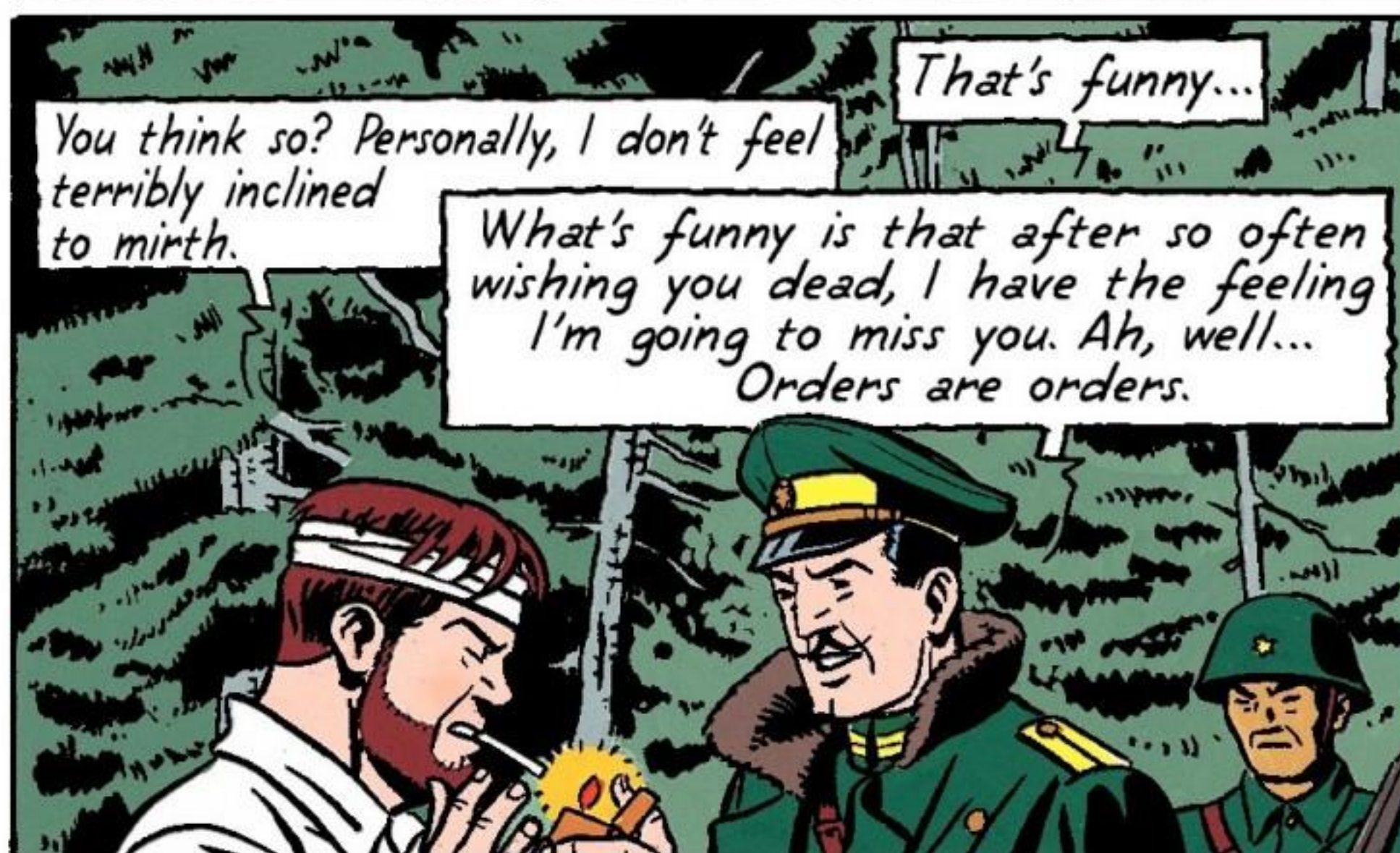
I'd have preferred a good pipe, but beggars can't be choosers...



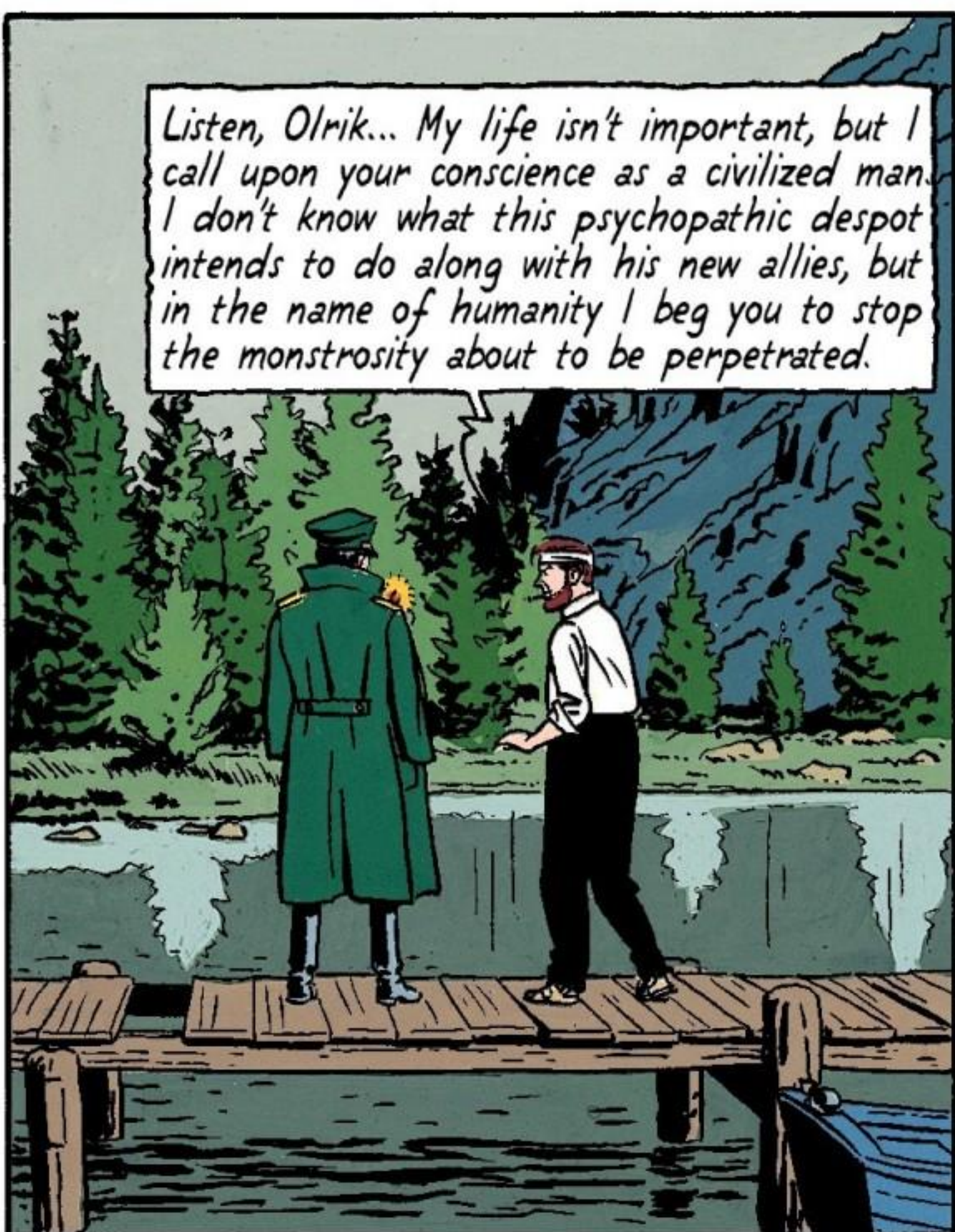
That's funny...

You think so? Personally, I don't feel terribly inclined to mirth.

What's funny is that after so often wishing you dead, I have the feeling I'm going to miss you. Ah, well... Orders are orders.



Listen, Olrik... My life isn't important, but I call upon your conscience as a civilized man. I don't know what this psychopathic despot intends to do along with his new allies, but in the name of humanity I beg you to stop the monstrosity about to be perpetrated.



Dear fellow, you must be joking. With or without me, Basam Damdu will succeed in his endeavour. And by nature, I prefer to be in the winners' camp. You know my motto: every man for himself.



You've really always remained the same despicable scoundrel, "Colonel"...



I won't miss you!



THE TWO SOLDIERS HAVE RUSHED FORWARD, ATTEMPTING TO RESTRAIN MORTIMER AS HE STRUGGLES MADLY.

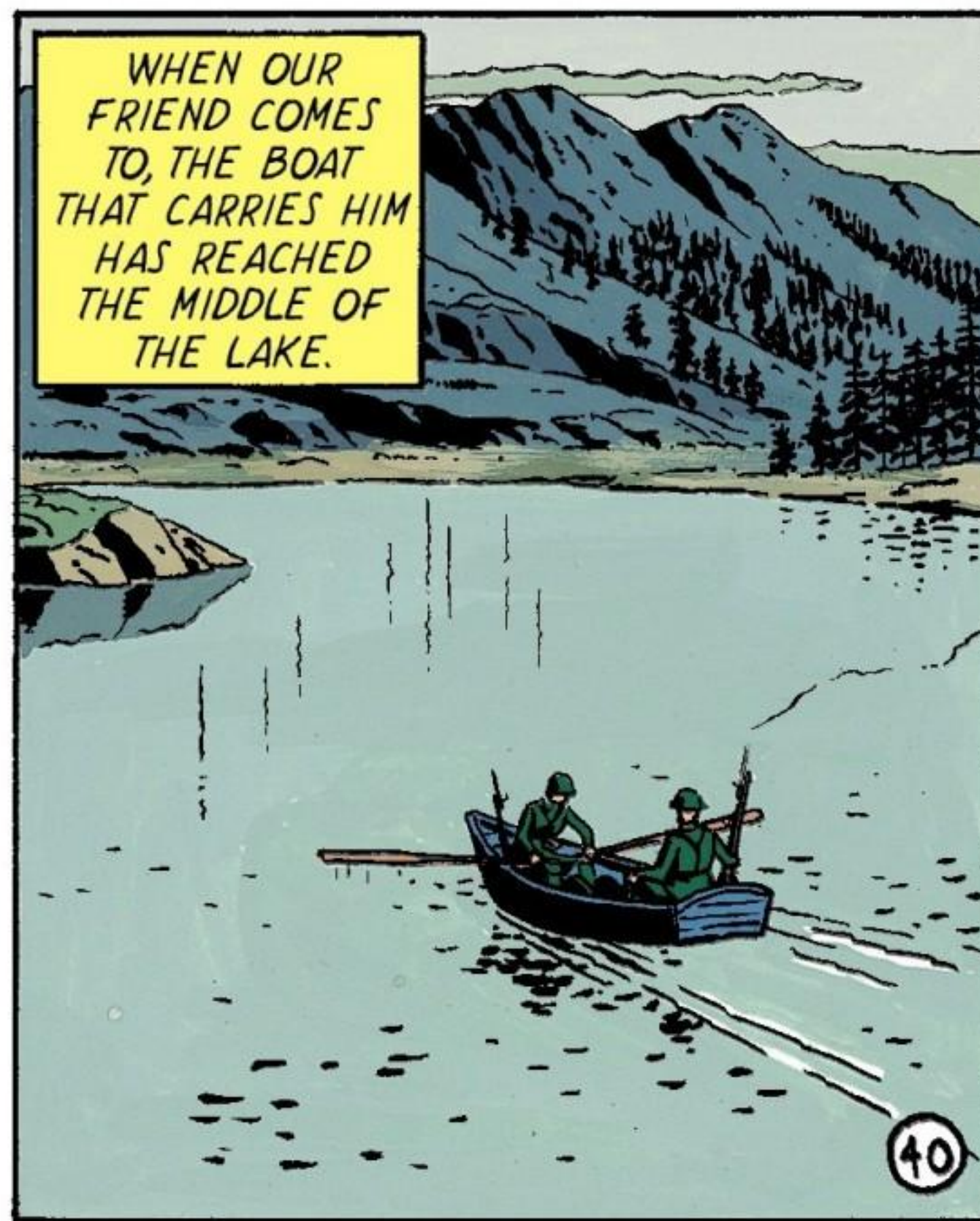
By the Devil, Mortimer! I thought I'd send you off painlessly with a bullet to the heart before dumping your body into the lake, but to repay me for that punch you'll taste the agony of drowning—you asked for it. Take him away, you two!



OW!



WHEN OUR FRIEND COMES TO, THE BOAT THAT CARRIES HIM HAS REACHED THE MIDDLE OF THE LAKE.



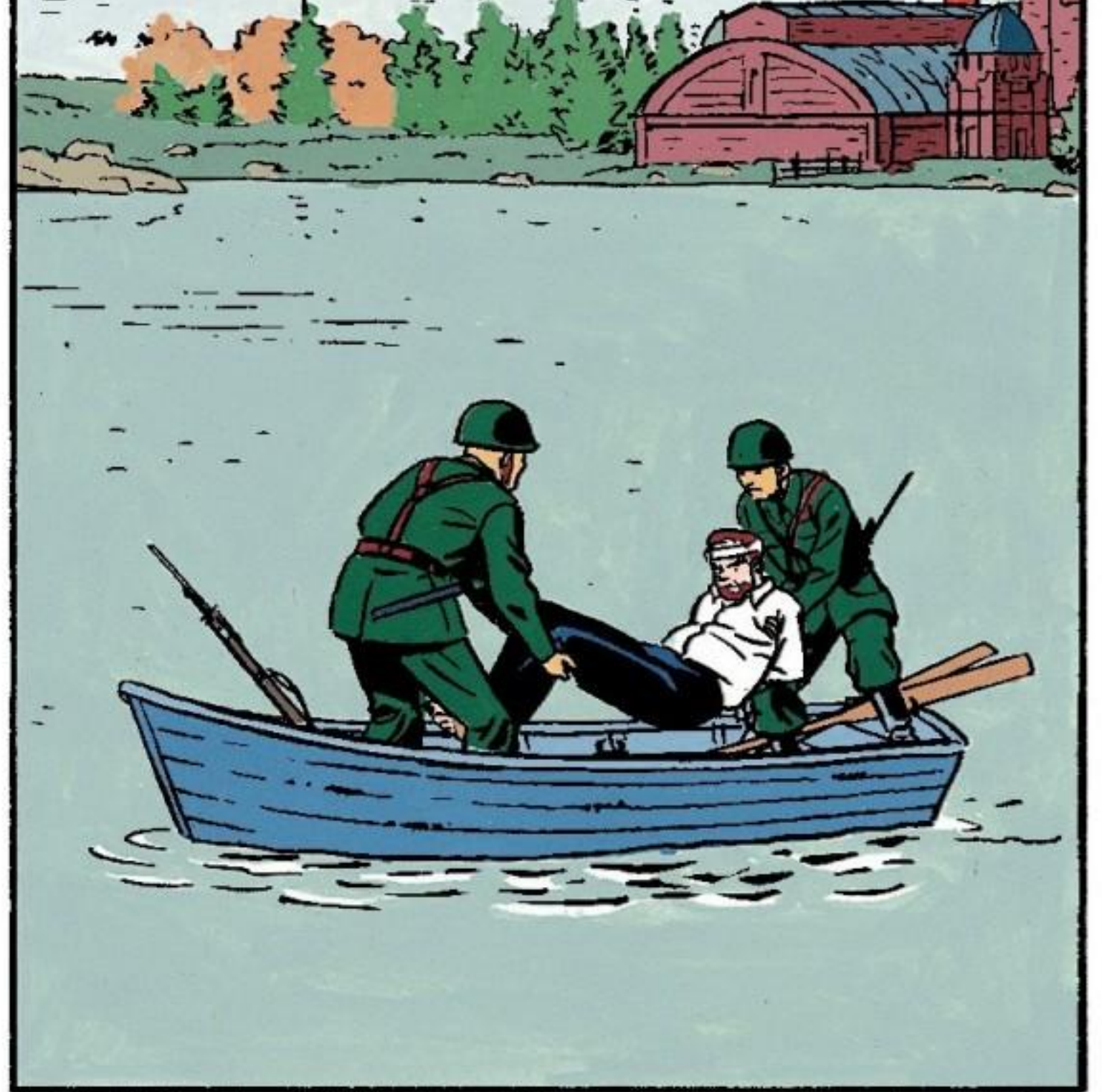
POWERLESS, HE DISCOVERS THAT HIS HANDS HAVE BEEN TIGHTLY BOUND BEHIND HIS BACK AND HIS LEGS TIED TOGETHER AND TO A HEAVY CAST-IRON WEIGHT.



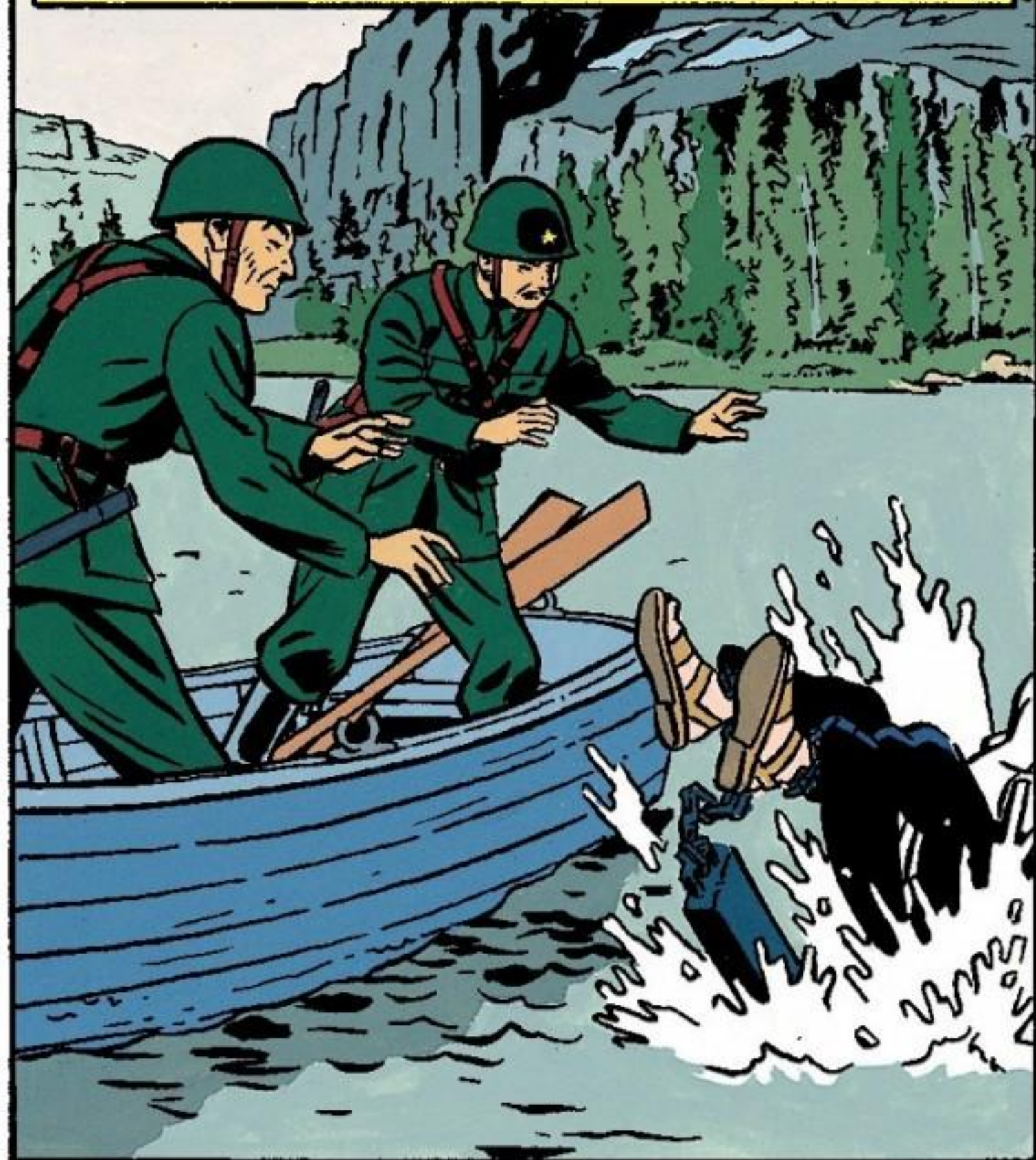
FROM THE JETTY OLRIK WATCHES THE LAST MINUTES OF HIS OLD ENEMY, NOT A TRACE OF EMOTION EVEN ONCE ALTERING THE EXPRESSION ON THE VILLAIN'S FACE.



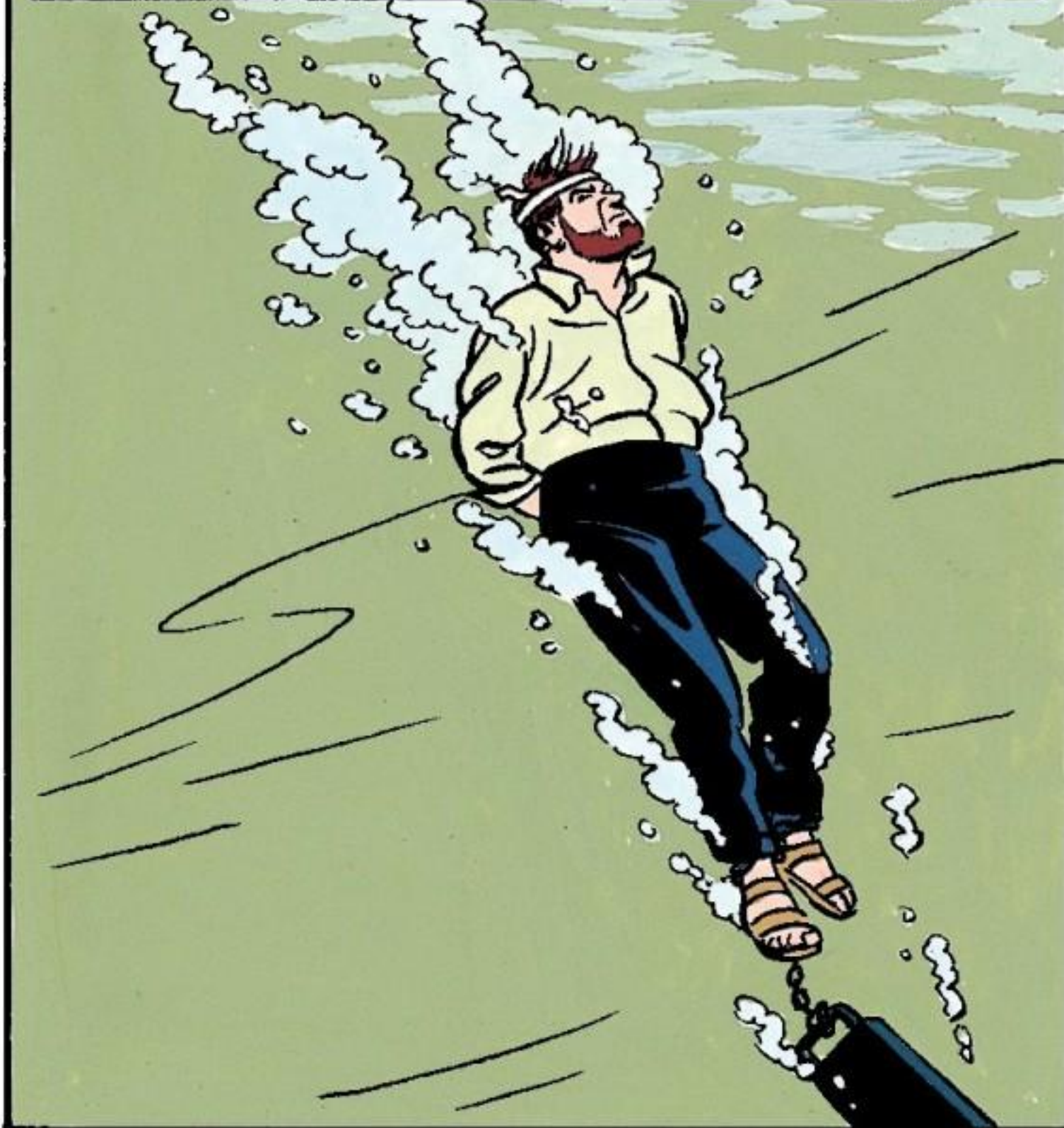
AT A SIGN FROM THE COLONEL, THE TWO GUARDS, SNIGGERING, GRAB HOLD OF MORTIMER, WHO IS UNABLE TO STRUGGLE...



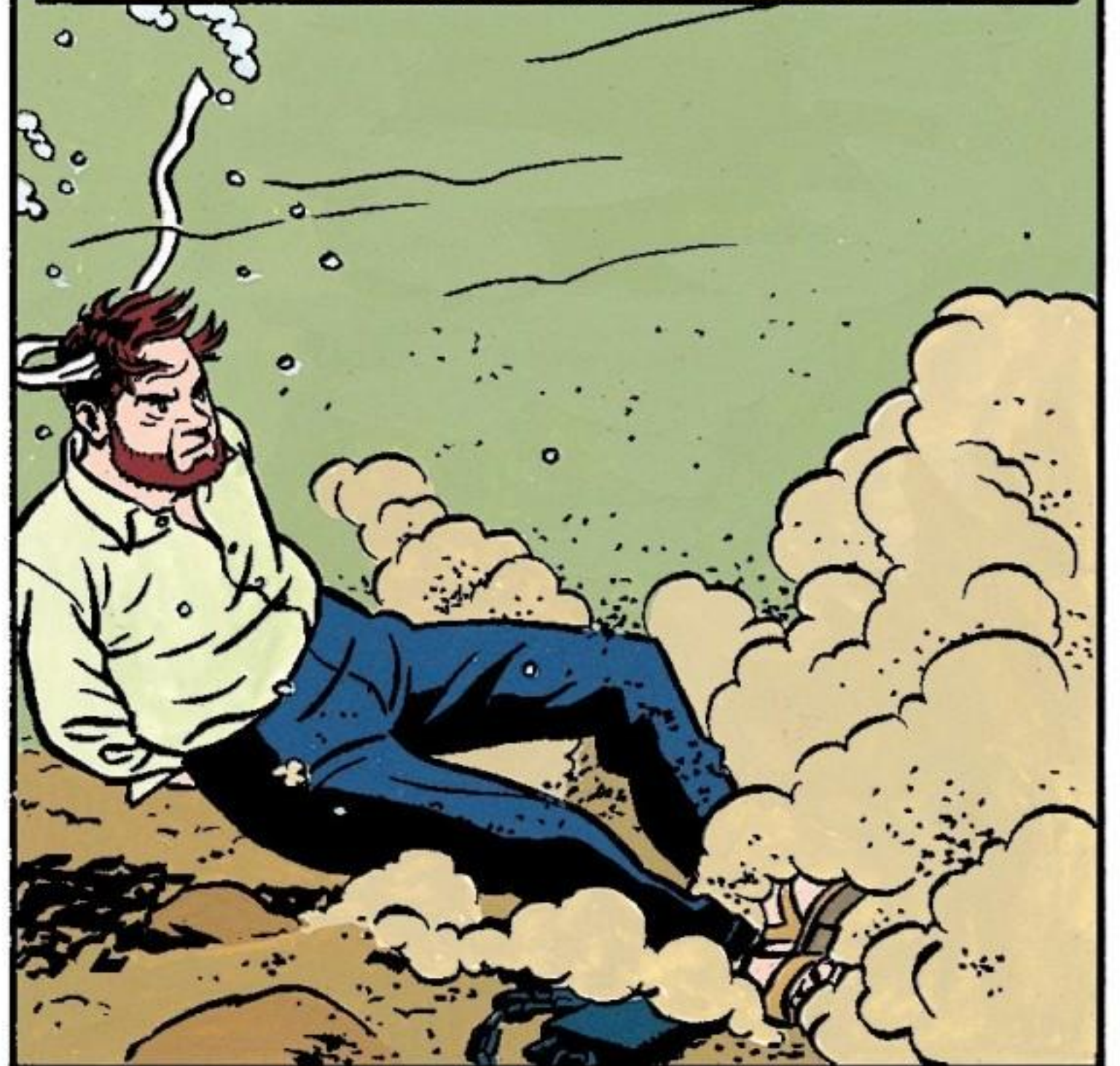
... AND WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A SINGLE WHIMPER FROM THEIR VICTIM, THEY THROW HIM OVERBOARD.



QUICKLY CARRIED DOWN BY THE CAST-IRON WEIGHT, OUR FRIEND SAYS AN INWARD FAREWELL TO HIS BELOVED SCOTLAND, TO HIS FRIEND BLAKE, TO ALL THOSE HE WILL NEVER SEE AGAIN.



WHEN HE REACHES THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE, HIS EARDRUMS ON THE EDGE OF BURSTING, HE KNOWS THAT NOTHING CAN SAVE HIM ANYMORE. IN A FEW SECONDS HIS INSTINCTS WILL FORCE HIM TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH, THE WATER WILL FILL HIS LUNGS, AND IT WILL BE THE END.



BUT AS HE IS CONSIGNING HIS SOUL TO GOD'S CARE, HIS BLURRED VISION VAGUELY REGISTERS A STRANGE CREATURE APPROACHING. COULD IT BE A WATER SPIRIT COME TO TAKE HIM INTO SOME MYSTERIOUS AQUATIC WORLD?



HIS HEAD ON FIRE, INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS HAPPENING, MORTIMER CONFUSEDLY FEELS THE MOUTHPIECE OF A RESPIRATOR BEING FORCED BETWEEN HIS LIPS. AIR! HE'S SUCKING IN AIR! HE'S SUCKING IN LIFE!

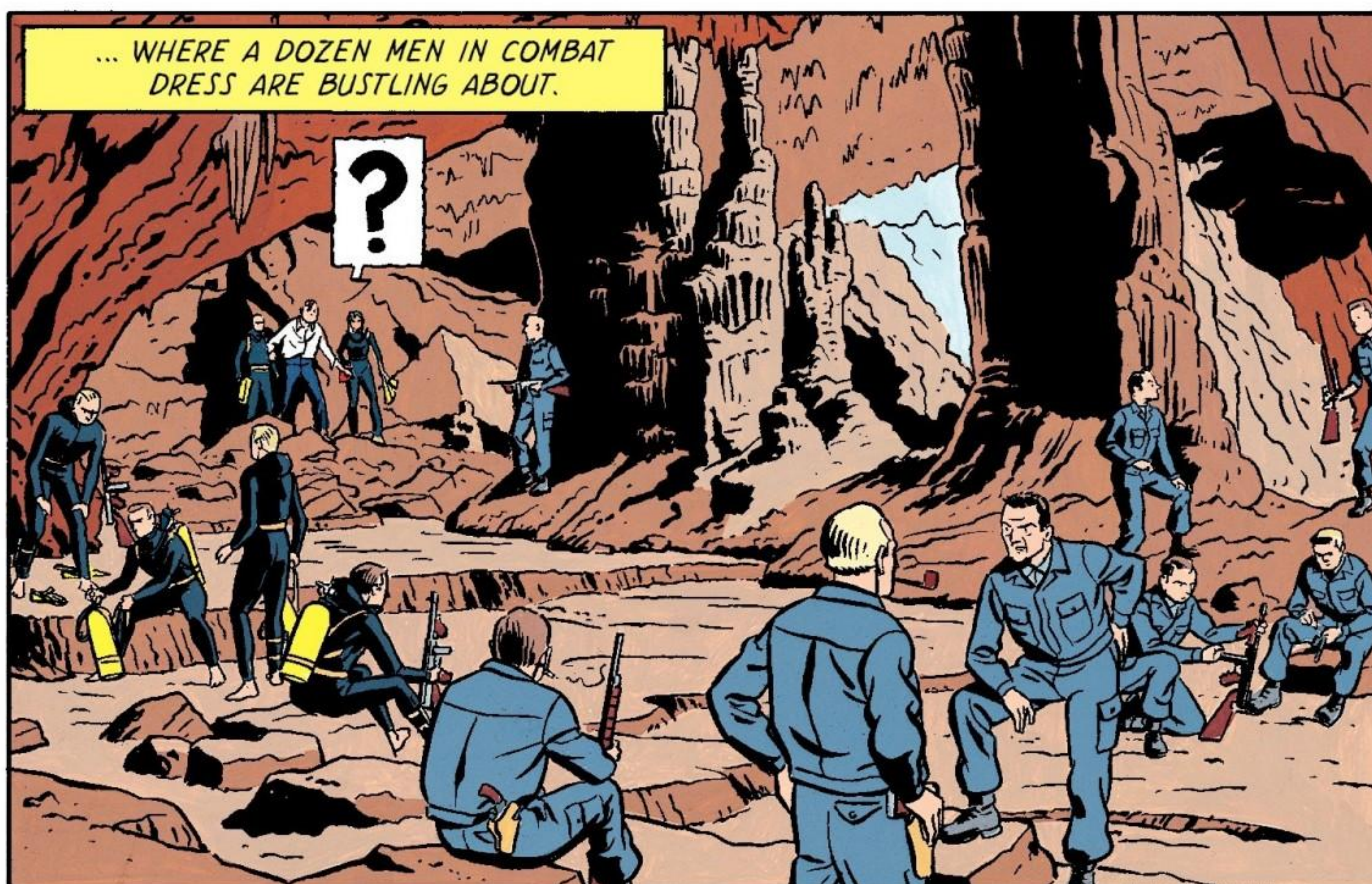
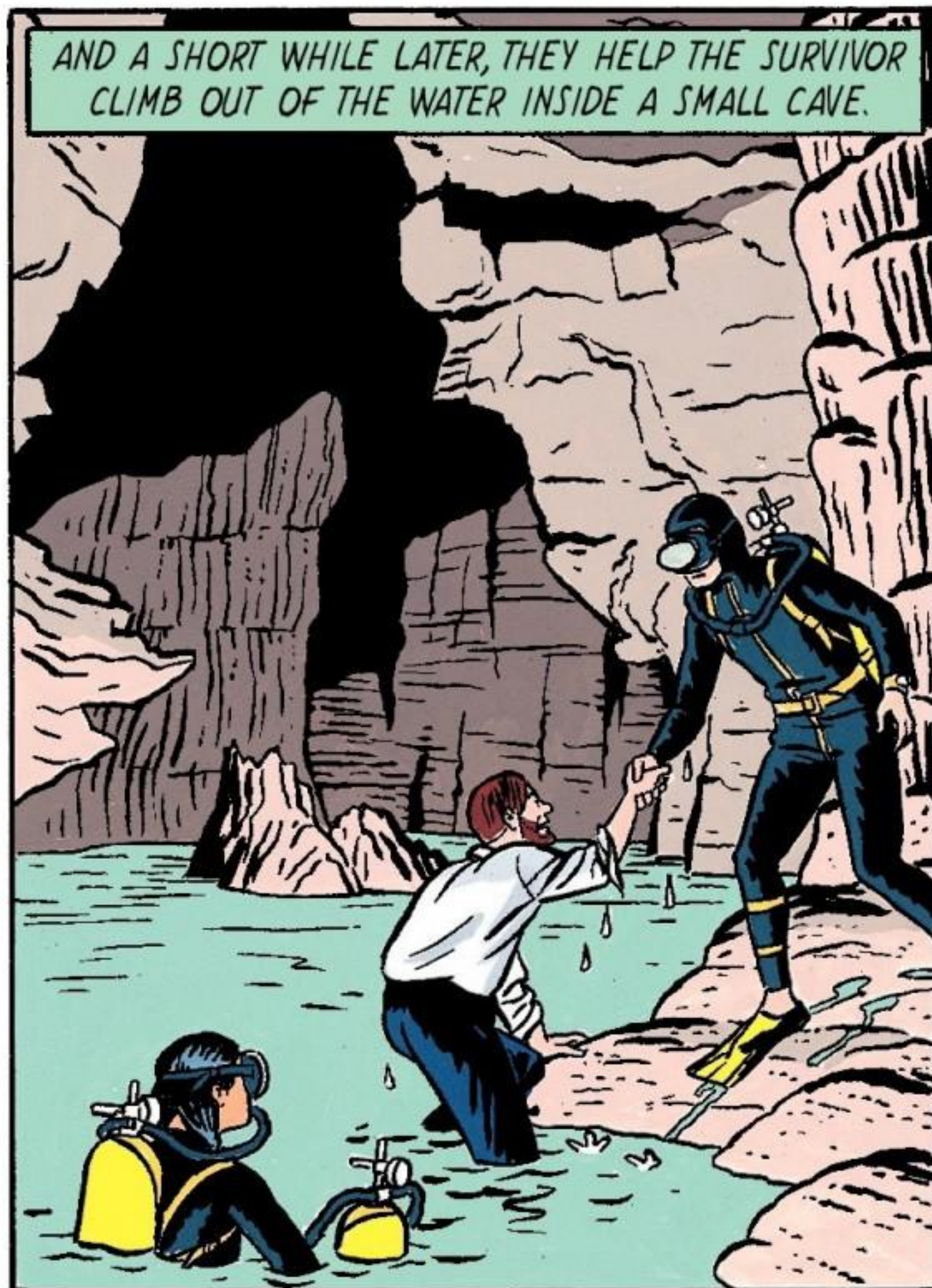


AT THE SAME TIME, A SECOND UNDERWATER CREATURE REMOVES HIS BONDS WITH A DIVING KNIFE.



THEN, BOTH OF THEM CARRY HIM INTO THE GLOOMY DEPTHS OF THE LAKE.

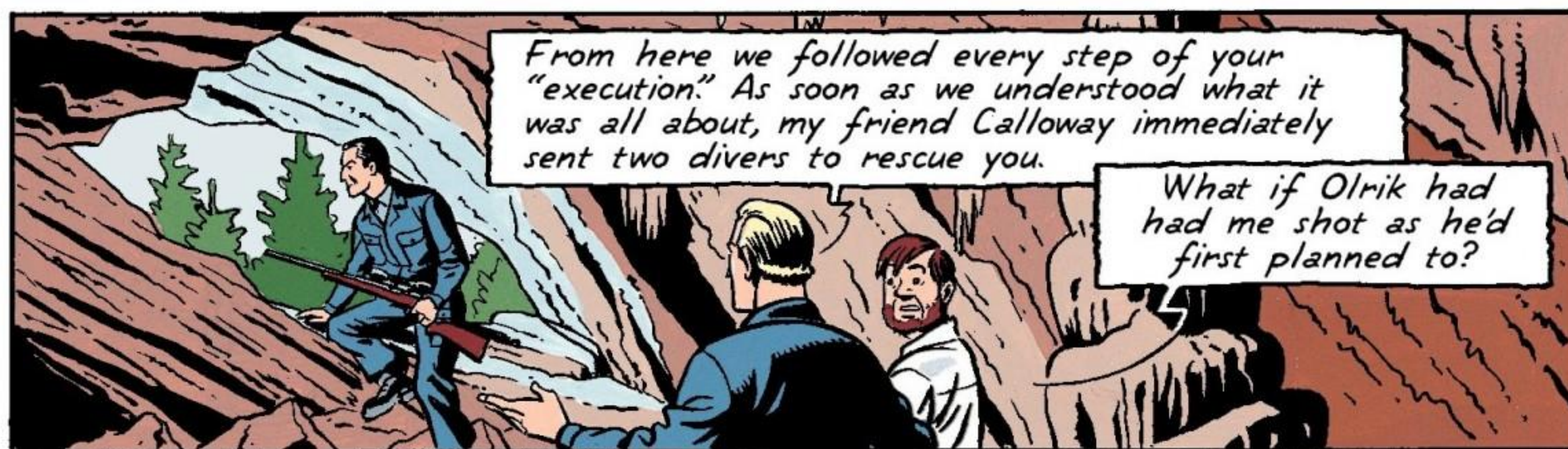






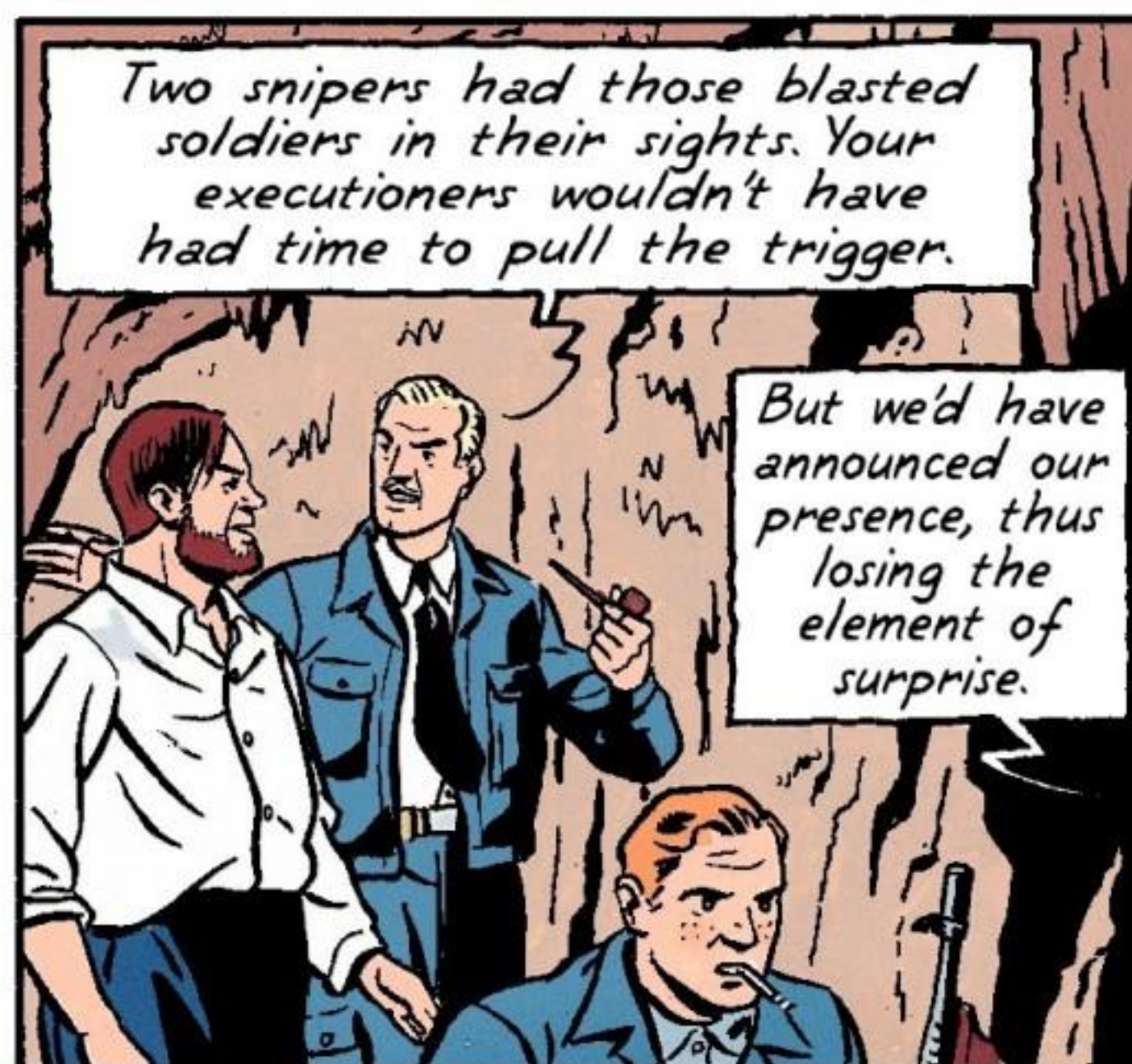
By Jove! Francis, how on Earth...!?

Not so much "on" as "under," old chap...



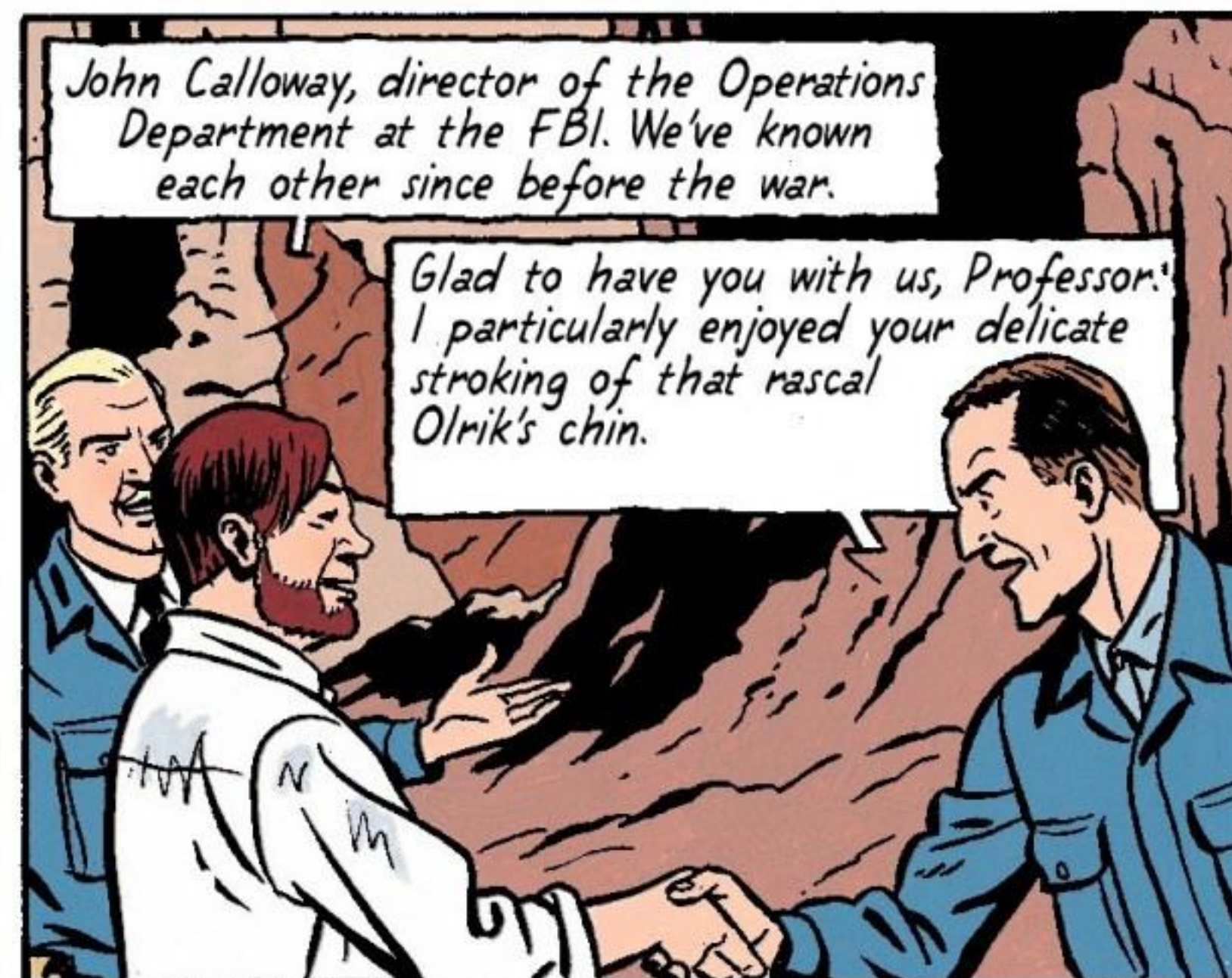
From here we followed every step of your "execution." As soon as we understood what it was all about, my friend Calloway immediately sent two divers to rescue you.

What if Olrik had had me shot as he'd first planned to?



Two snipers had those blasted soldiers in their sights. Your executioners wouldn't have had time to pull the trigger.

But we'd have announced our presence, thus losing the element of surprise.



John Calloway, director of the Operations Department at the FBI. We've known each other since before the war.

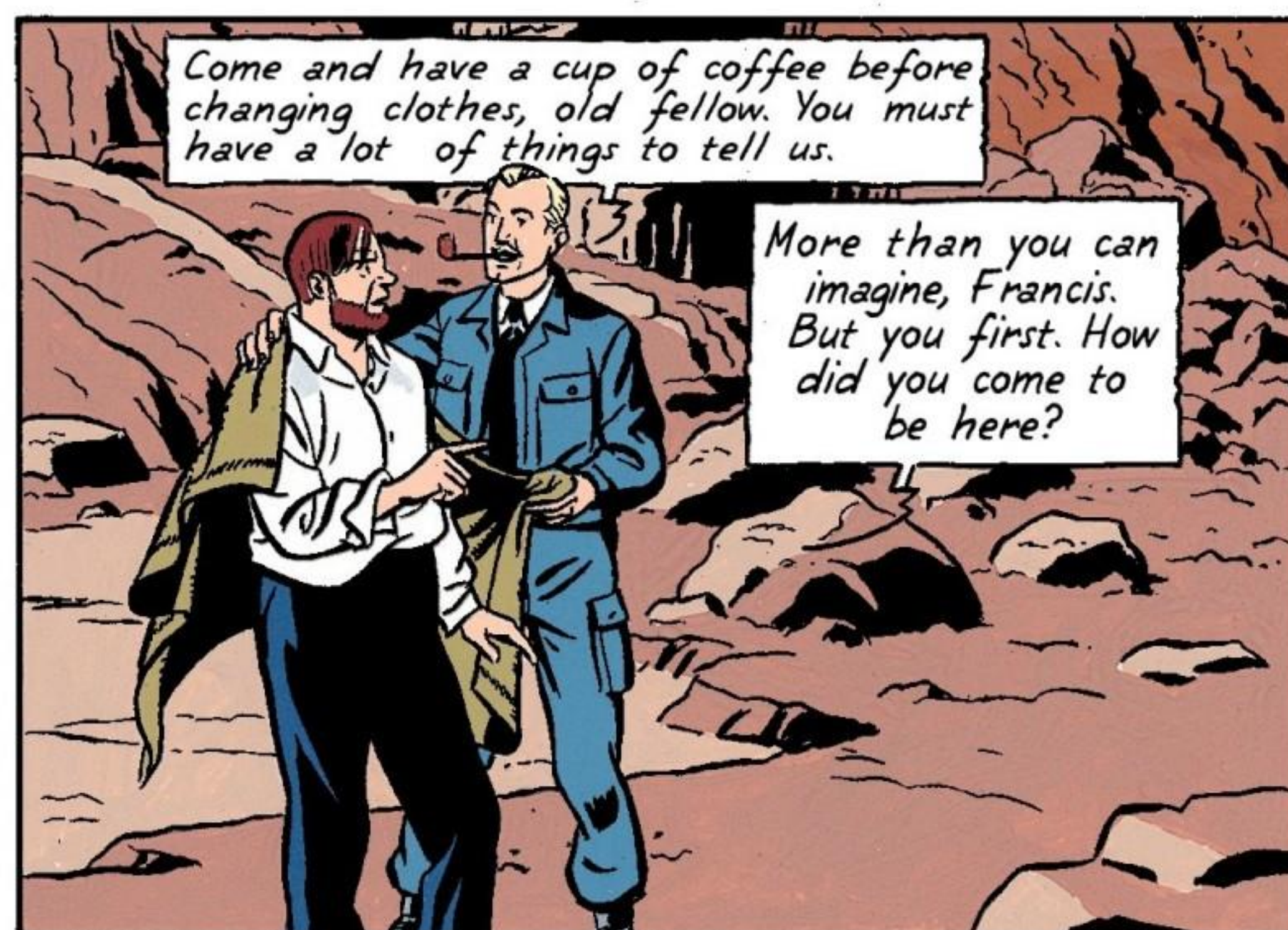
Glad to have you with us, Professor. I particularly enjoyed your delicate stroking of that rascal Olrik's chin.



You already know Agent Jessie Wingo, my deputy and the first woman ever to reach this rank in the Bureau. She's half Cheyenne and knows the area like the back of her hand. It was she who found us this observation post.

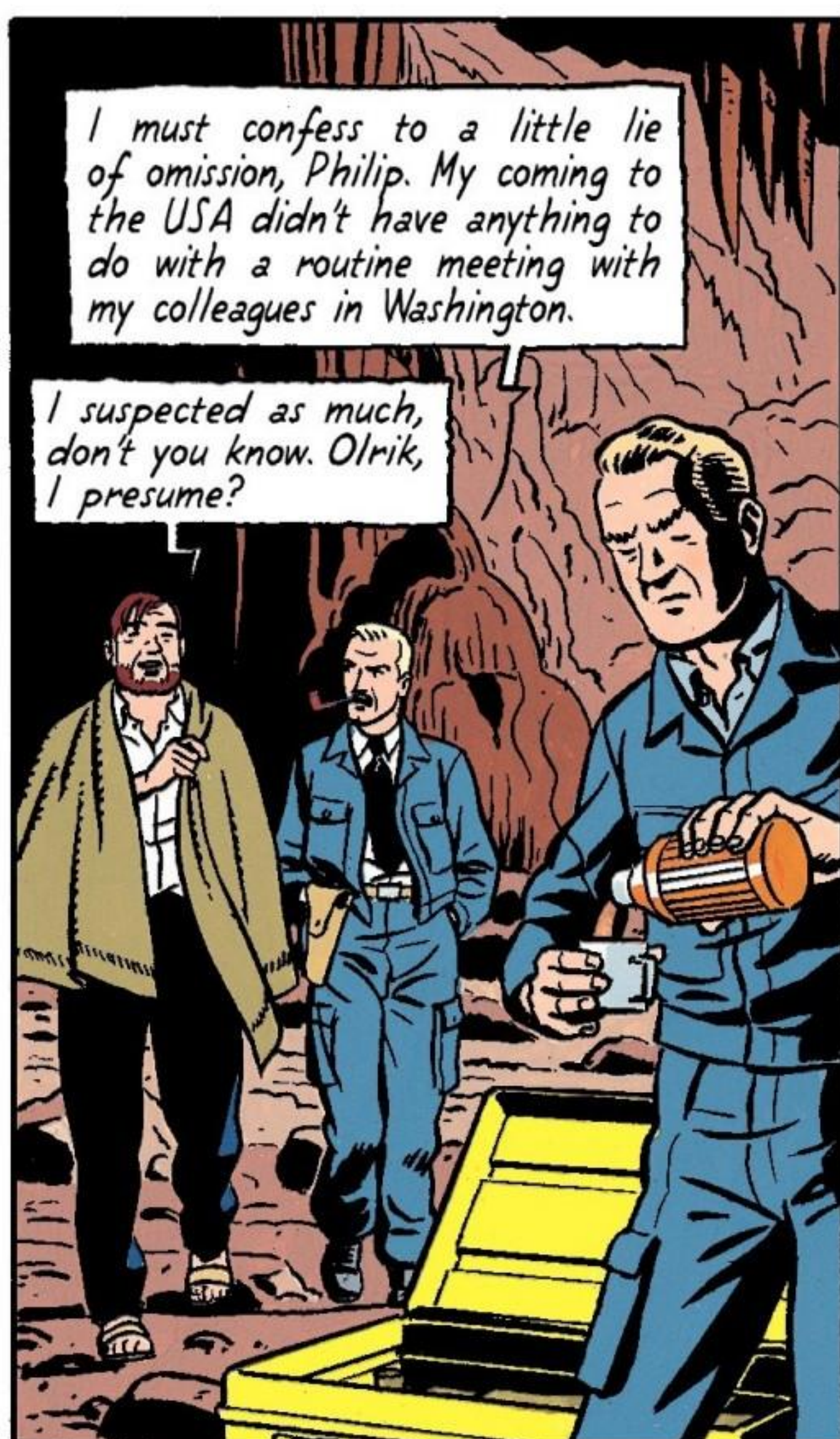
How can I thank you, Miss Wingo?

Don't thank me, Professor. It's all in a day's work for us.



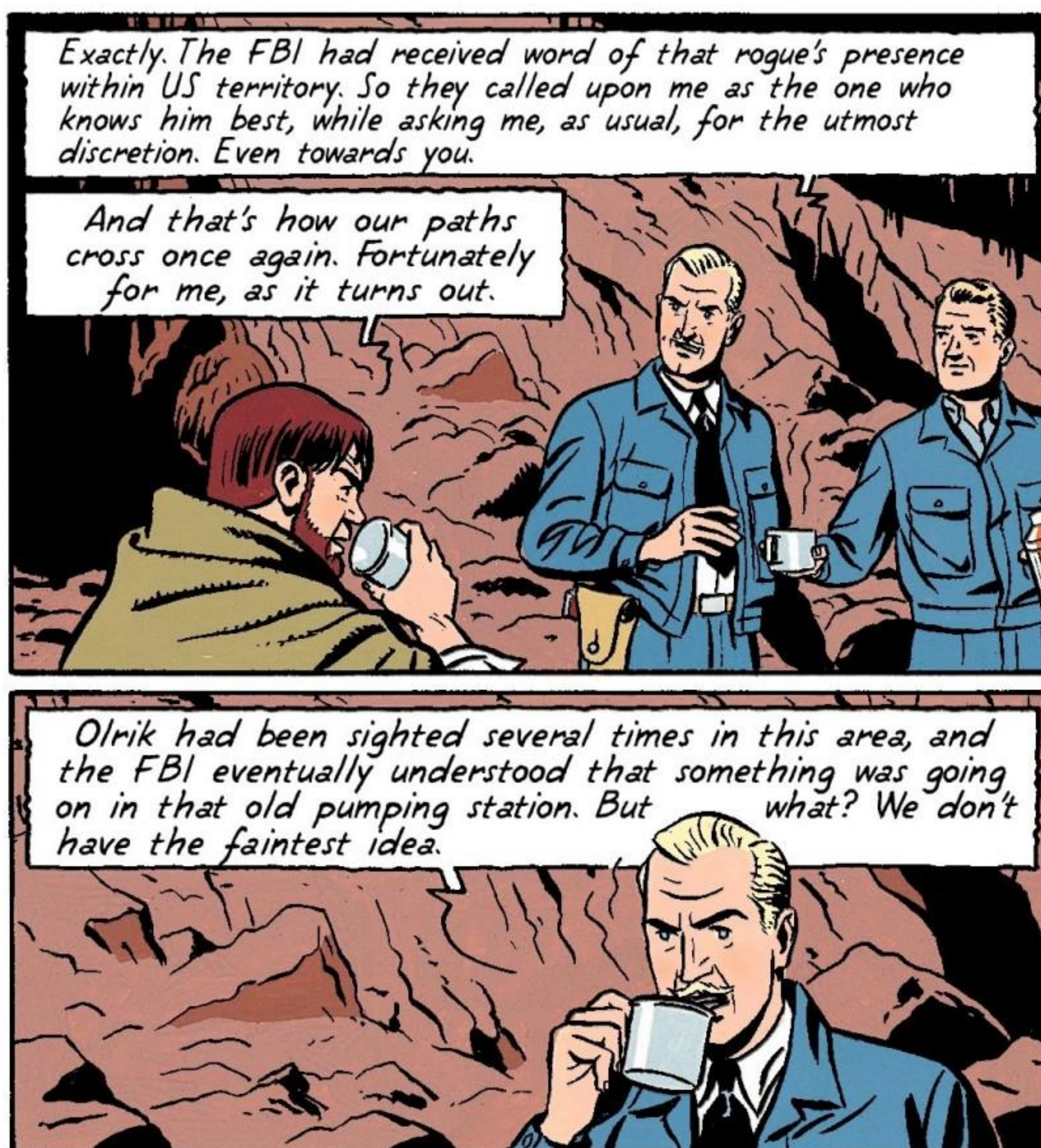
Come and have a cup of coffee before changing clothes, old fellow. You must have a lot of things to tell us.

More than you can imagine, Francis. But you first. How did you come to be here?



I must confess to a little lie of omission, Philip. My coming to the USA didn't have anything to do with a routine meeting with my colleagues in Washington.

I suspected as much, don't you know. Olrik, I presume?



Exactly. The FBI had received word of that rogue's presence within US territory. So they called upon me as the one who knows him best, while asking me, as usual, for the utmost discretion. Even towards you.

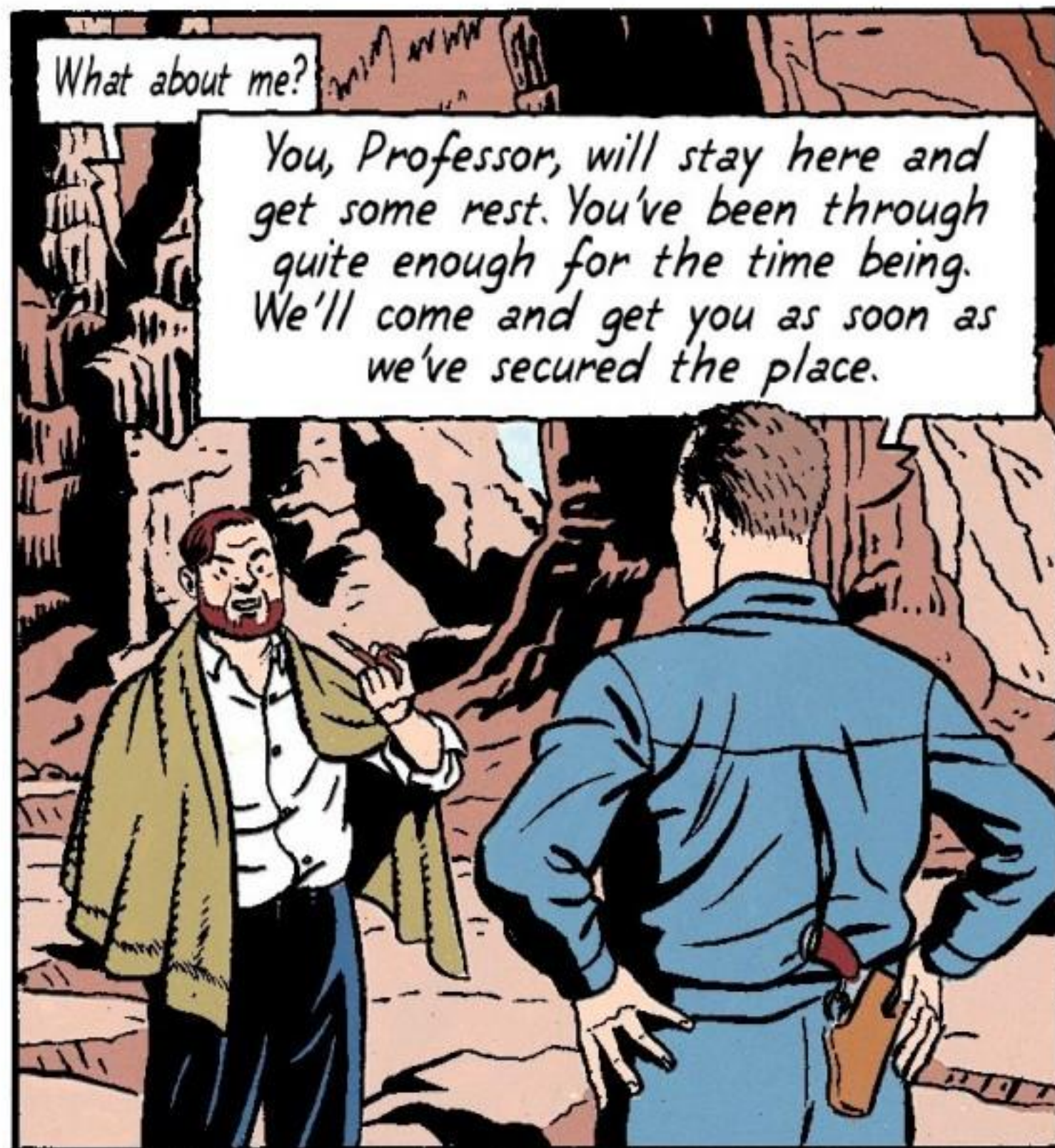
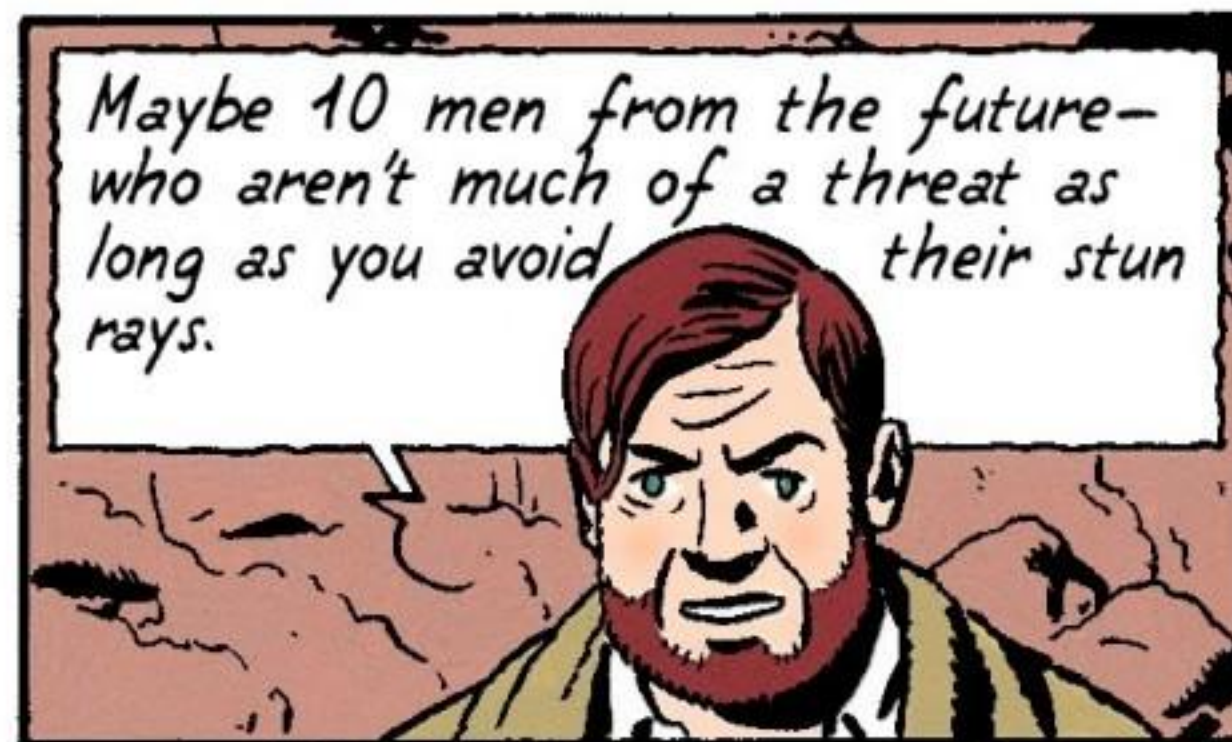
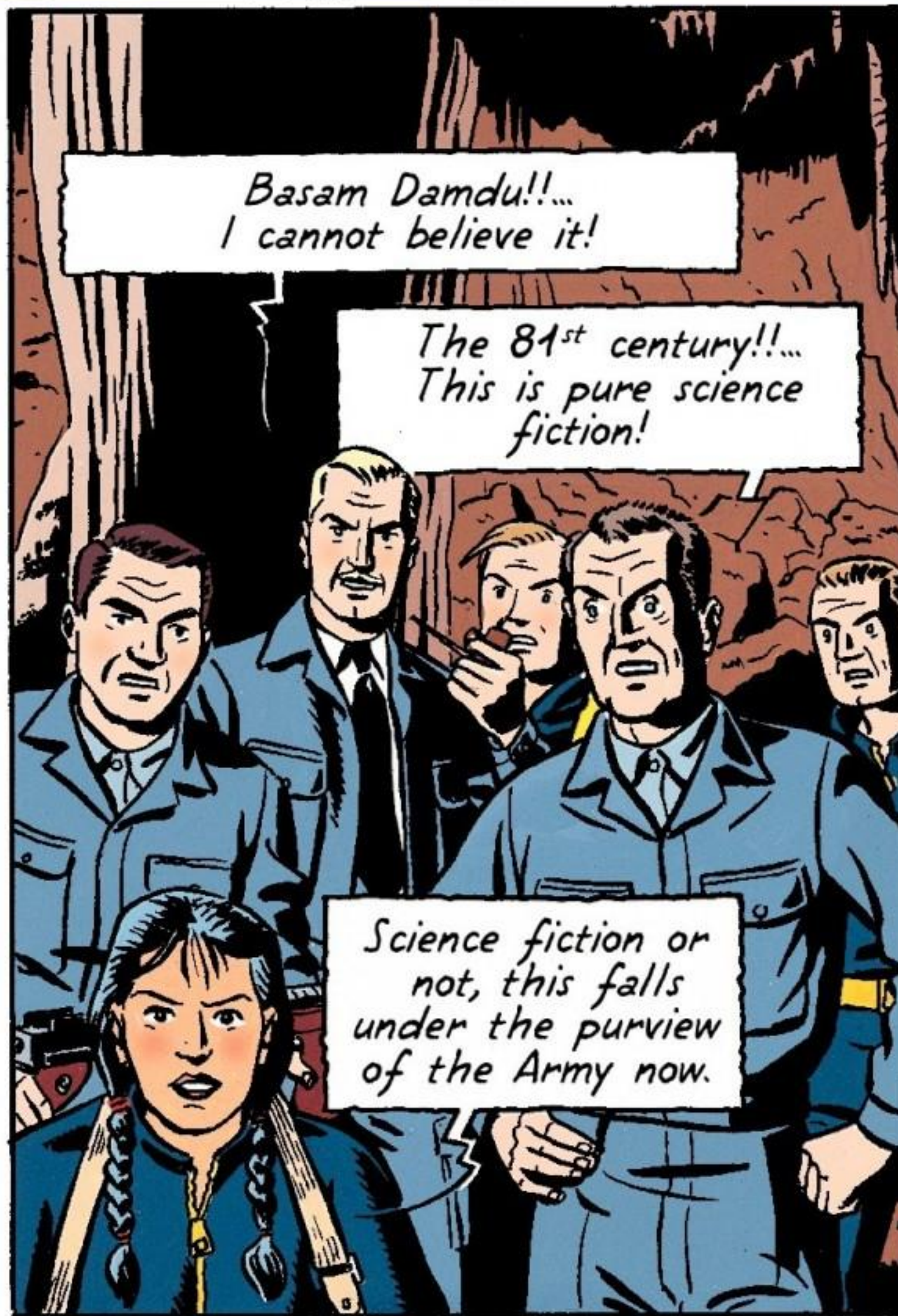
And that's how our paths cross once again. Fortunately for me, as it turns out.

Olrik had been sighted several times in this area, and the FBI eventually understood that something was going on in that old pumping station. But what? We don't have the faintest idea.



Oh, that's easy. Our friend the colonel is simply getting ready to invade the planet. Say, Francis, you wouldn't have a pipe to lend me?

AN HOUR LATER, HAVING DONNED SOME DRY CLOTHES, MORTIMER FINISHES RECOUNTING HIS INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE TO BLAKE AND THE UTTERLY MESMERIZED FBI AGENTS.



IN LESS THAN 45 MINUTES, AND AS AN EARLY SNOW SOFTLY DRAPES THE LAKE'S SURROUNDINGS, THE THREE TEAMS OF THE "OPERATIONS" DEPARTMENT HAVE POSITIONED THEMSELVES ACCORDING TO THEIR COMMANDER'S INSTRUCTIONS.



CALLOWAY HAS JOINED THE GROUP TO THE EAST OF THE STATION...

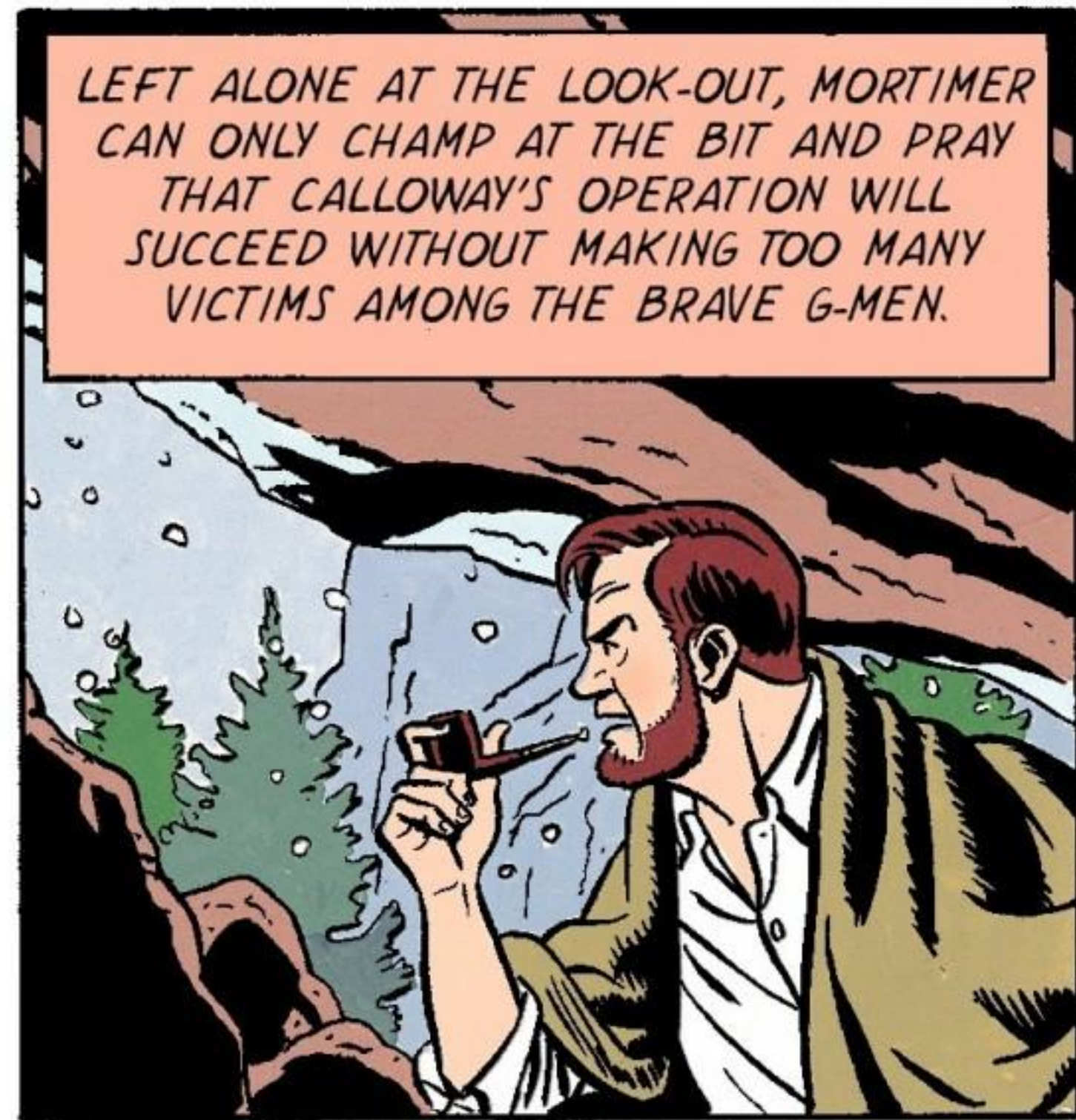
... WHILE JESSIE WINGO AND HER DIVERS ARE PREPARING FOR ACTION...



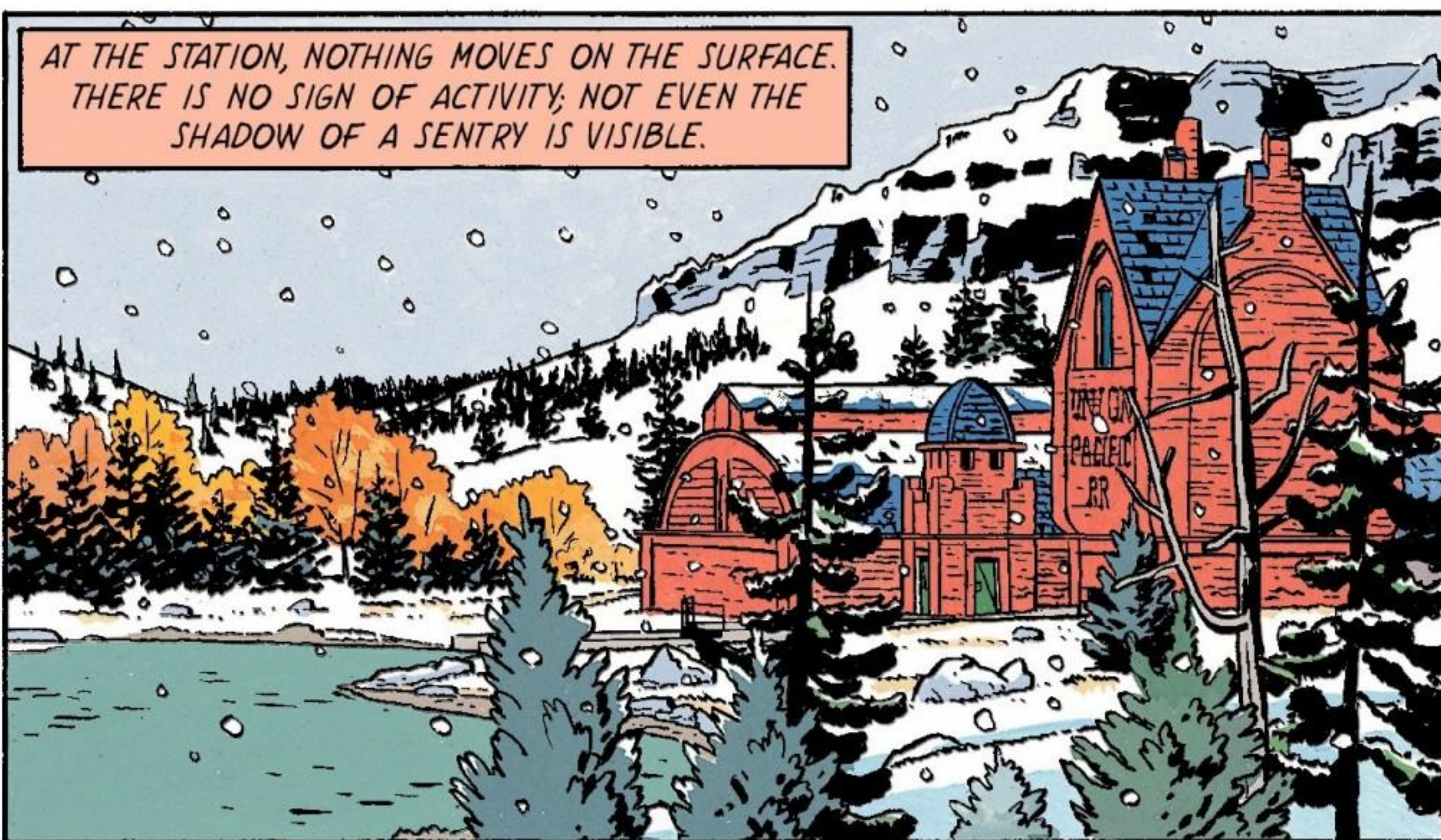
... AND A DEMOLITION SPECIALIST FROM BLAKE'S TEAM IS SETTING UP THE CHARGES AT THE DESIGNATED SPOT.



LEFT ALONE AT THE LOOK-OUT, MORTIMER CAN ONLY CHAMP AT THE BIT AND PRAY THAT CALLOWAY'S OPERATION WILL SUCCEED WITHOUT MAKING TOO MANY VICTIMS AMONG THE BRAVE G-MEN.



AT THE STATION, NOTHING MOVES ON THE SURFACE. THERE IS NO SIGN OF ACTIVITY; NOT EVEN THE SHADOW OF A SENTRY IS VISIBLE.



All set, Captain.

Good. Let's find some cover; we have six minutes left.



ALL OF THE TEAM LEADERS HAVE THEIR EYES GLUED TO THEIR WATCHES.



THESE MEN, VETERANS OF THE TOUGHEST FIGHTS, KNOW HOW THE MINUTES BEFORE AN ATTACK CAN SEEM TO STRETCH ON...

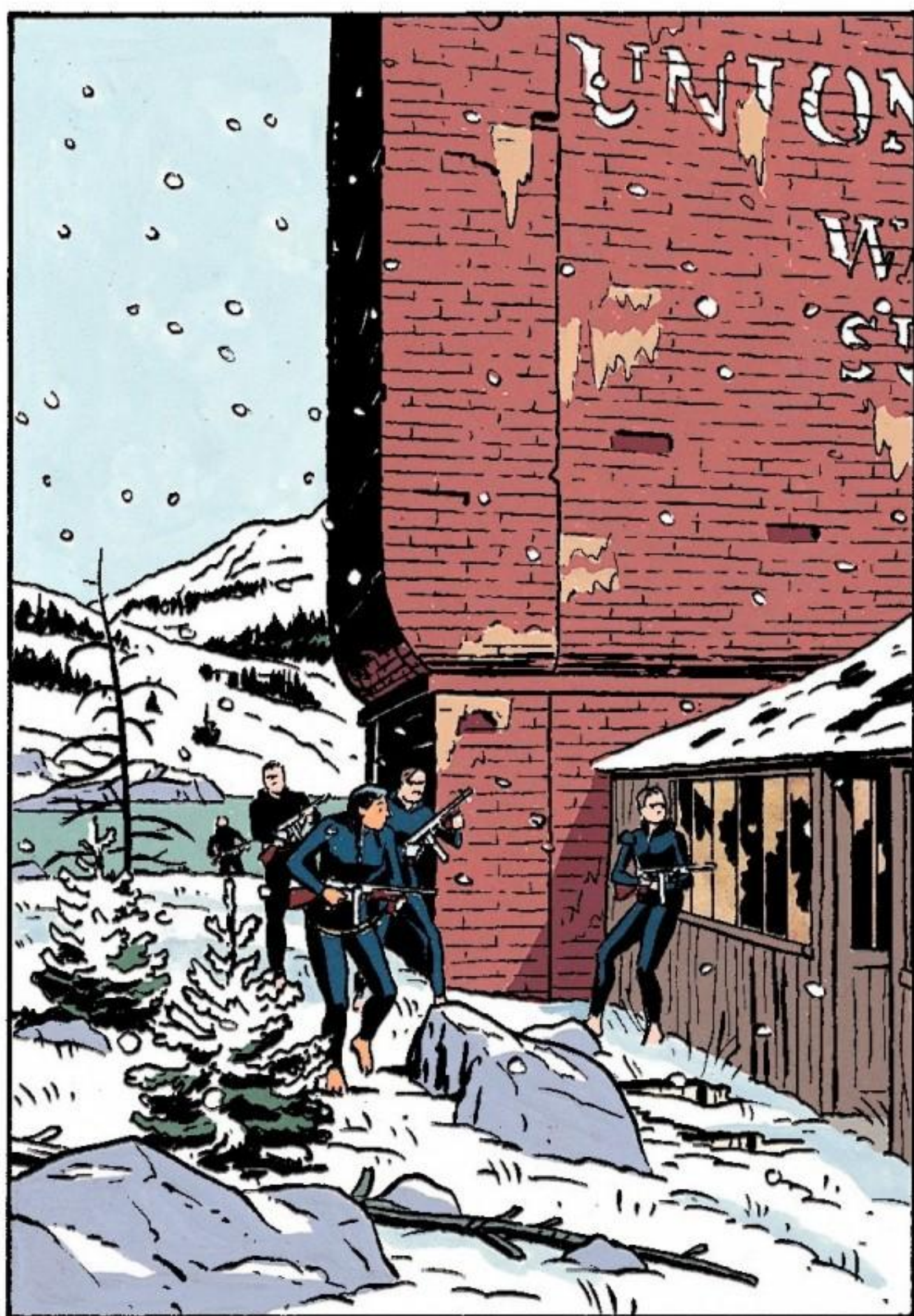
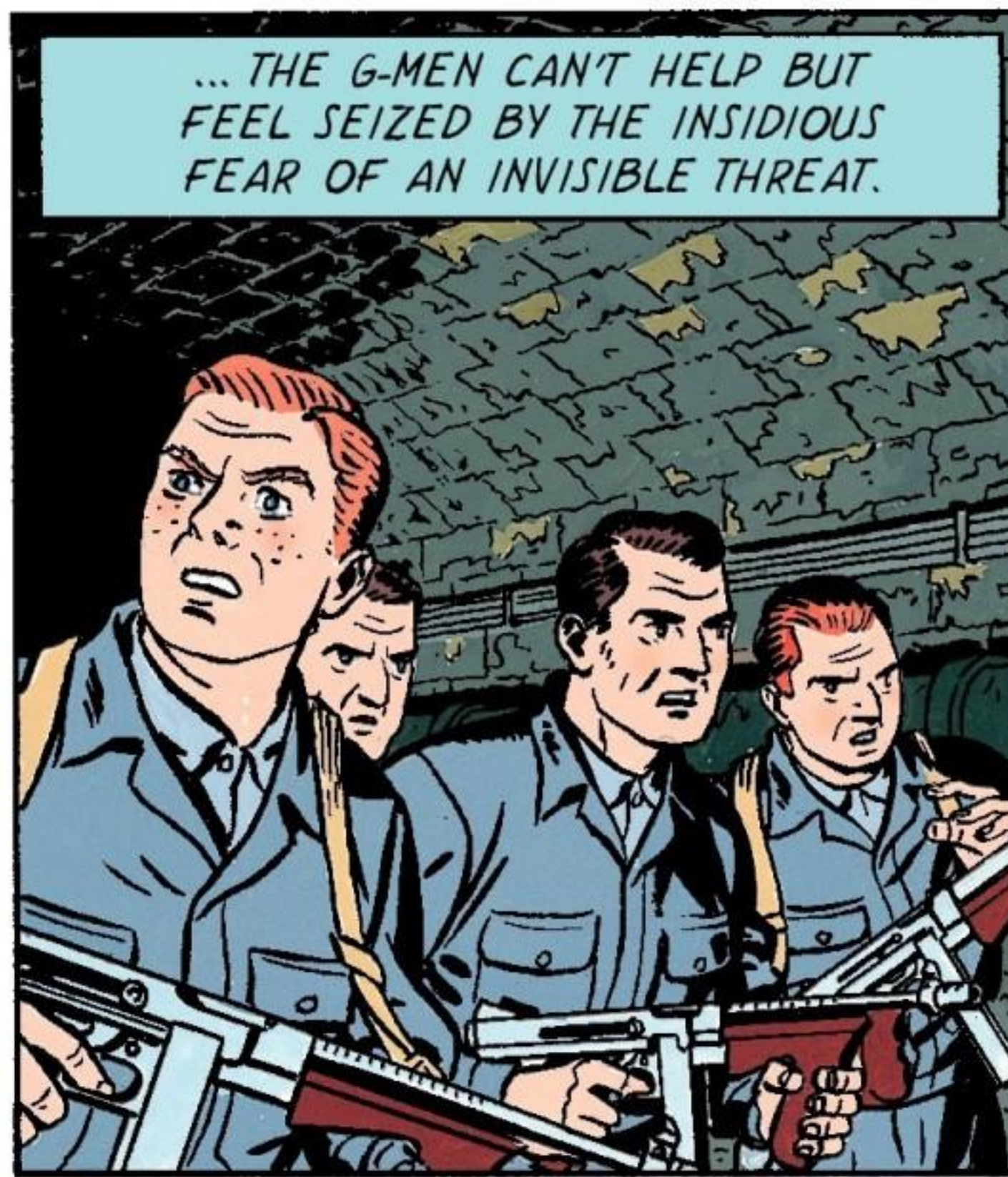
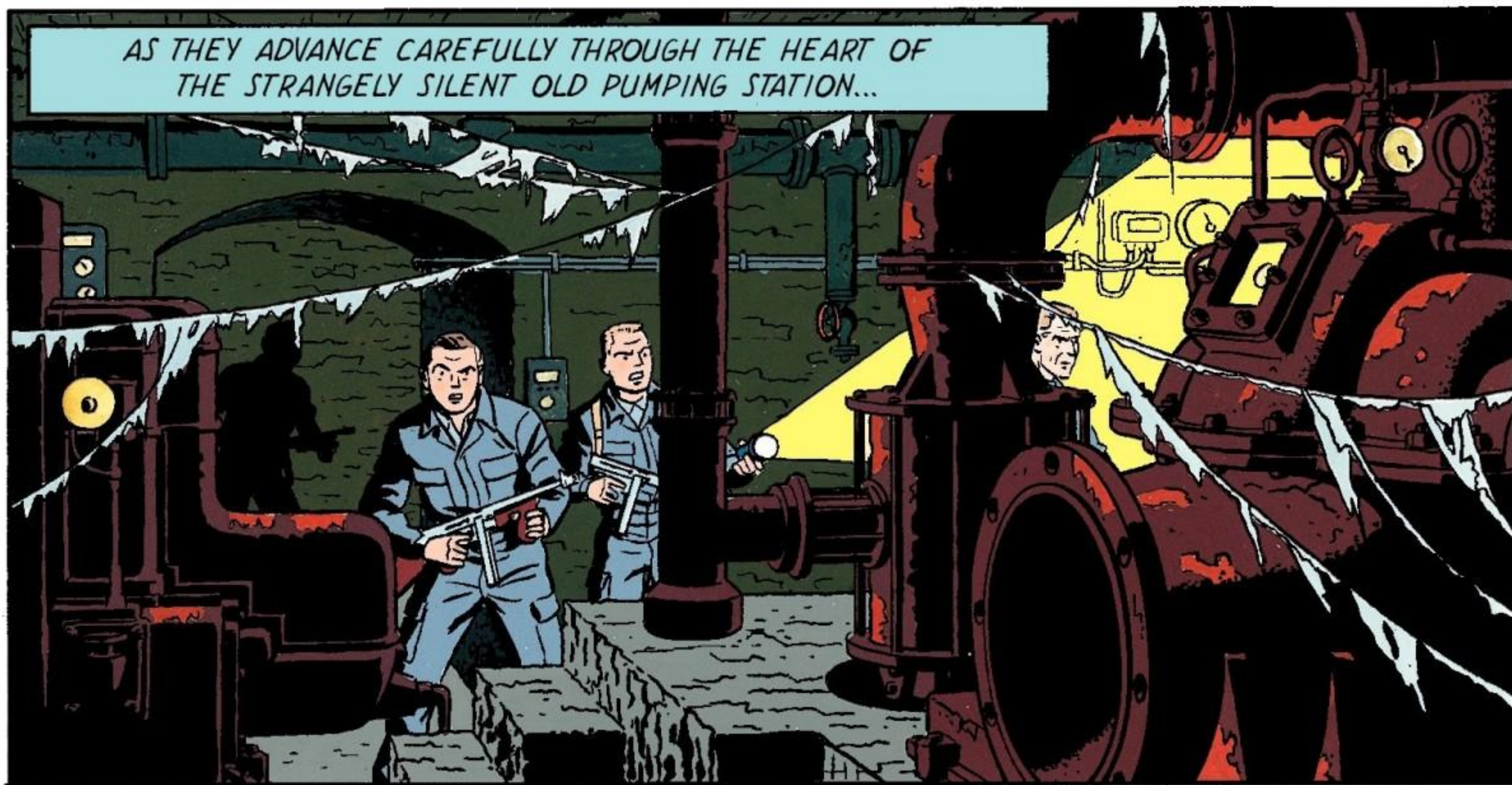


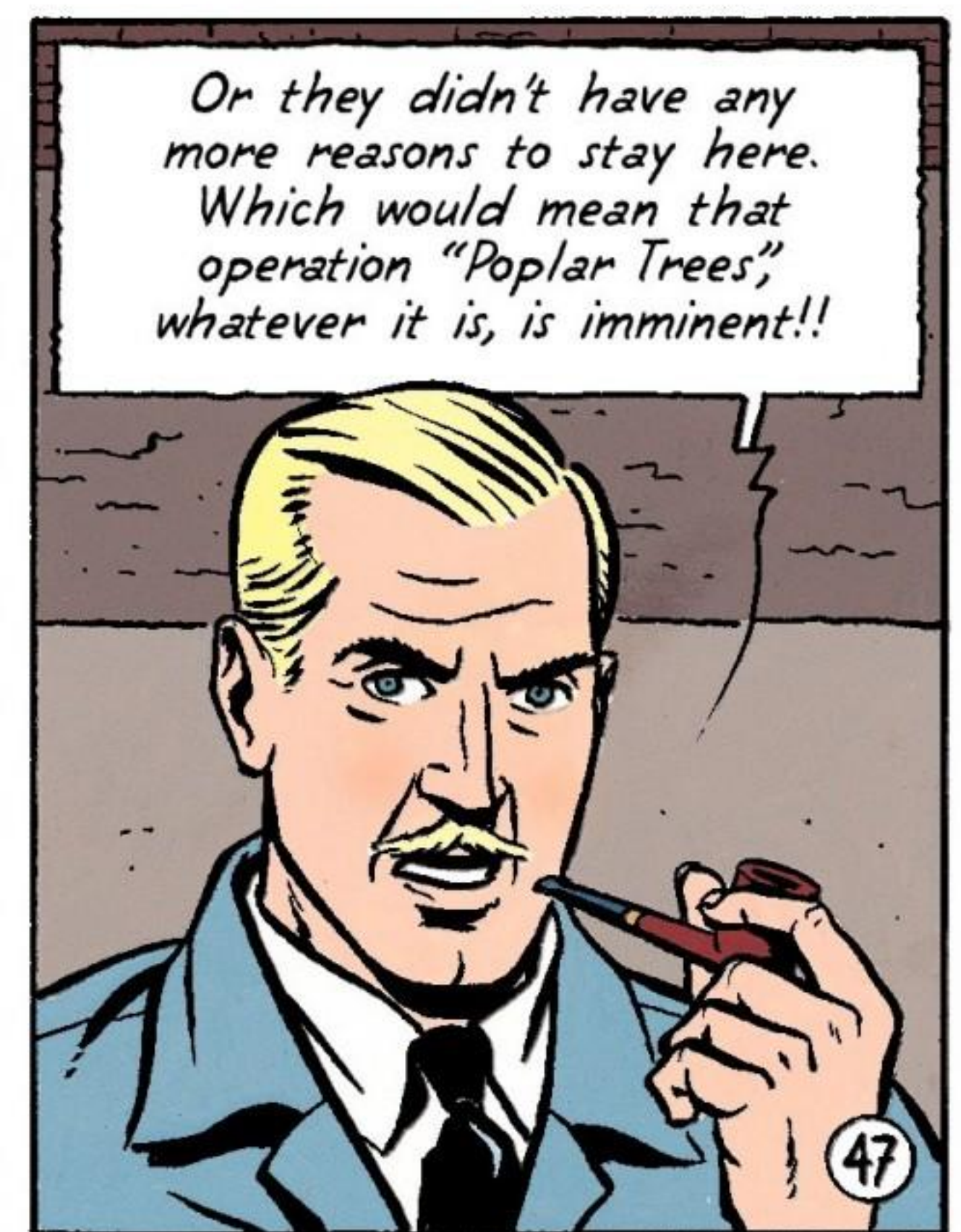
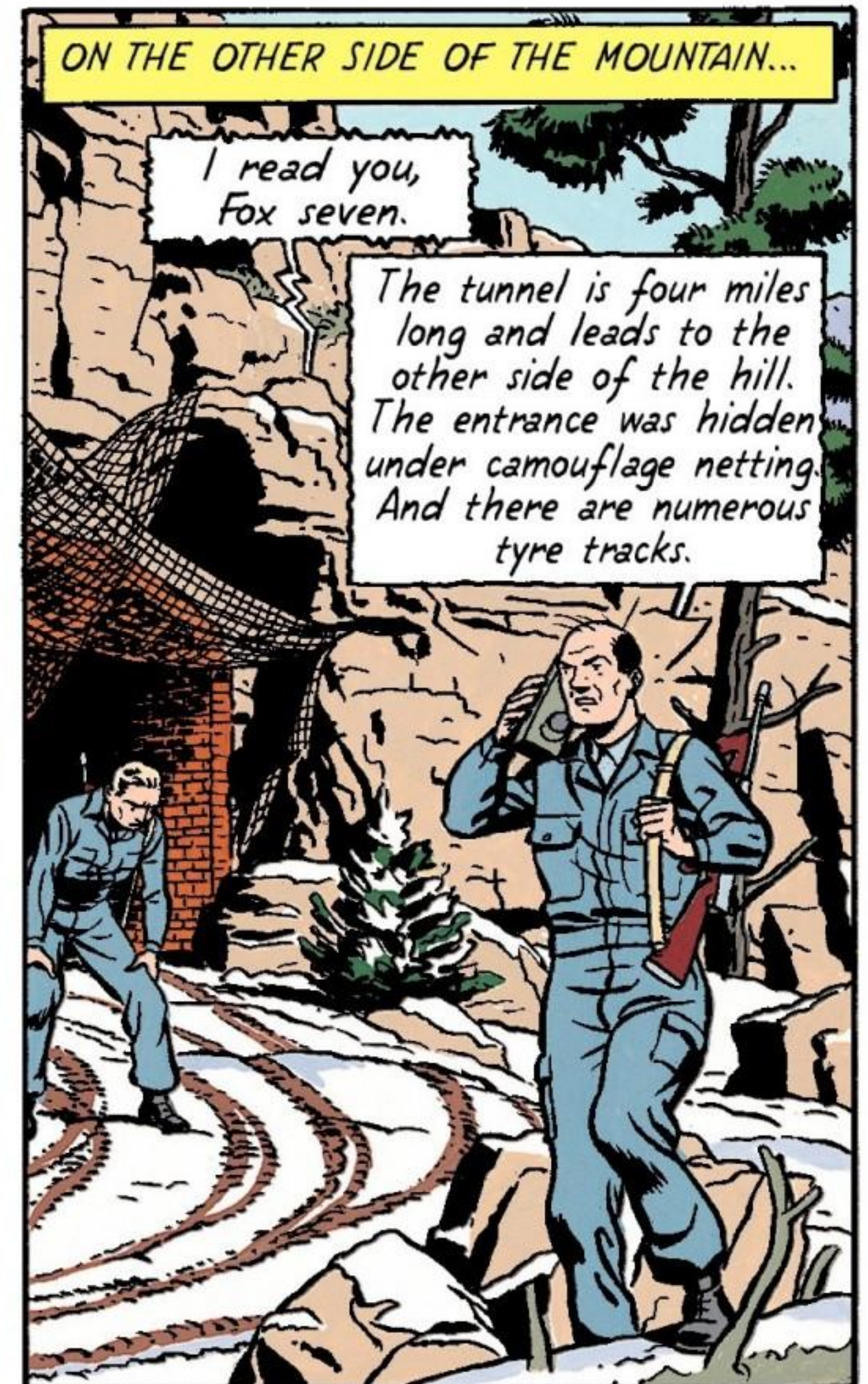
... FOREVER...



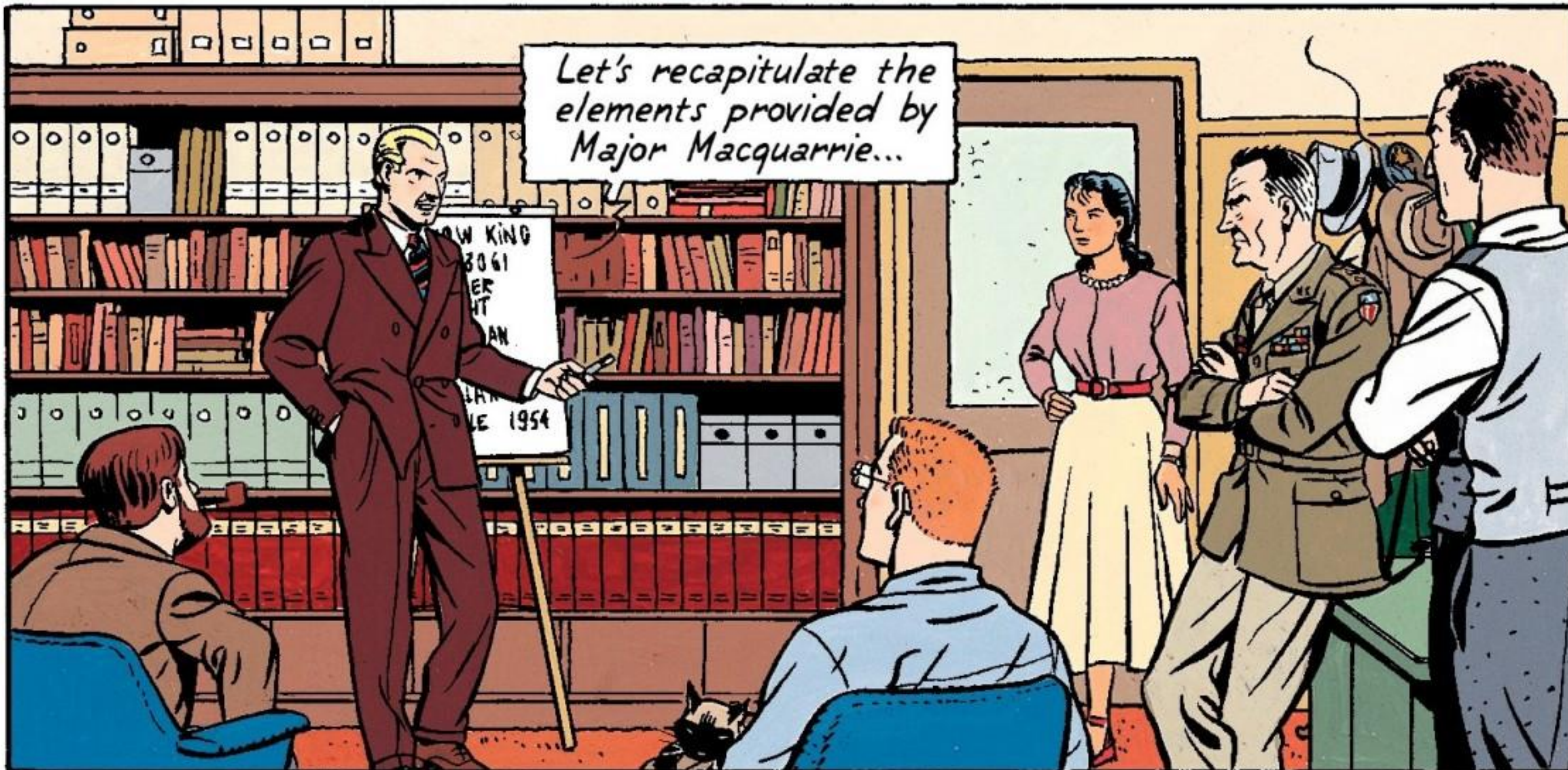
GO!







THE VERY NEXT DAY, A "WAR COUNCIL" PRESIDED OVER BY BLAKE IS HELD AT THE SUFOS HEADQUARTERS WITHIN THE CSS BUILDING. DR KAUFMAN, URGENTLY RECALLED, IS THERE FOR THE MEETING, ACCOMPANIED BY A HIGH-RANKING USAF OFFICER.



Let's recapitulate the elements provided by Major Macquarrie...

Yellow King... 8061... Danger... Light... Plutonian... H... Poplar trees... Temple 1954. The Yellow King is obviously Basam Damdu, and 8061 is the year from which our invaders come. The meanings of "danger" and "light" are self-evident.

YELLOW KING
8061
DANGER
LIGHT
PLUTONIAN
H
POPLAR TREES
TEMPLE 1954

On the other hand, the second half of the message remains rather mysterious.

We know that "Poplar Trees" is the codename for their operation. As for "H," it's probably the H hour Dr Z'ong mentioned. This expression was unknown in the 18th century, and Macquarrie must have transcribed it without understanding.



That leaves "plutonian" and "Temple 1954." Why "plutonian" when we know these people aren't from planet Pluto but from the future of Earth itself?

That is what we must figure out, my dear. And we must figure it out quickly.



I had the FBI inventory all temples registered within the USA. You know our country is home to many religions and a multitude of cults, each having its own church, temple or shrine.



We have found no "plutonian" cult, nor any temple named "The Poplars." However, there are some small places called Poplar Bluff, Poplar Falls, etc. And dozens of "The Poplars" retirement homes.

I may have an explanation for this temple, gentlemen...



Mortimer told us that Dr Z'ong used the cores of comets to bounce his temporal beams. It so happens that there is a comet named Tempel, after the astronomer who discovered it in the 19th century. You will note that "Tempel" and "Temple" are pronounced the same way in English.



There... The Tempel comet has a period of 5.982 years. Its next passage, visible from Mexico and the southern United States, will take place on October the 17th, 1954, between 5am and 8am.

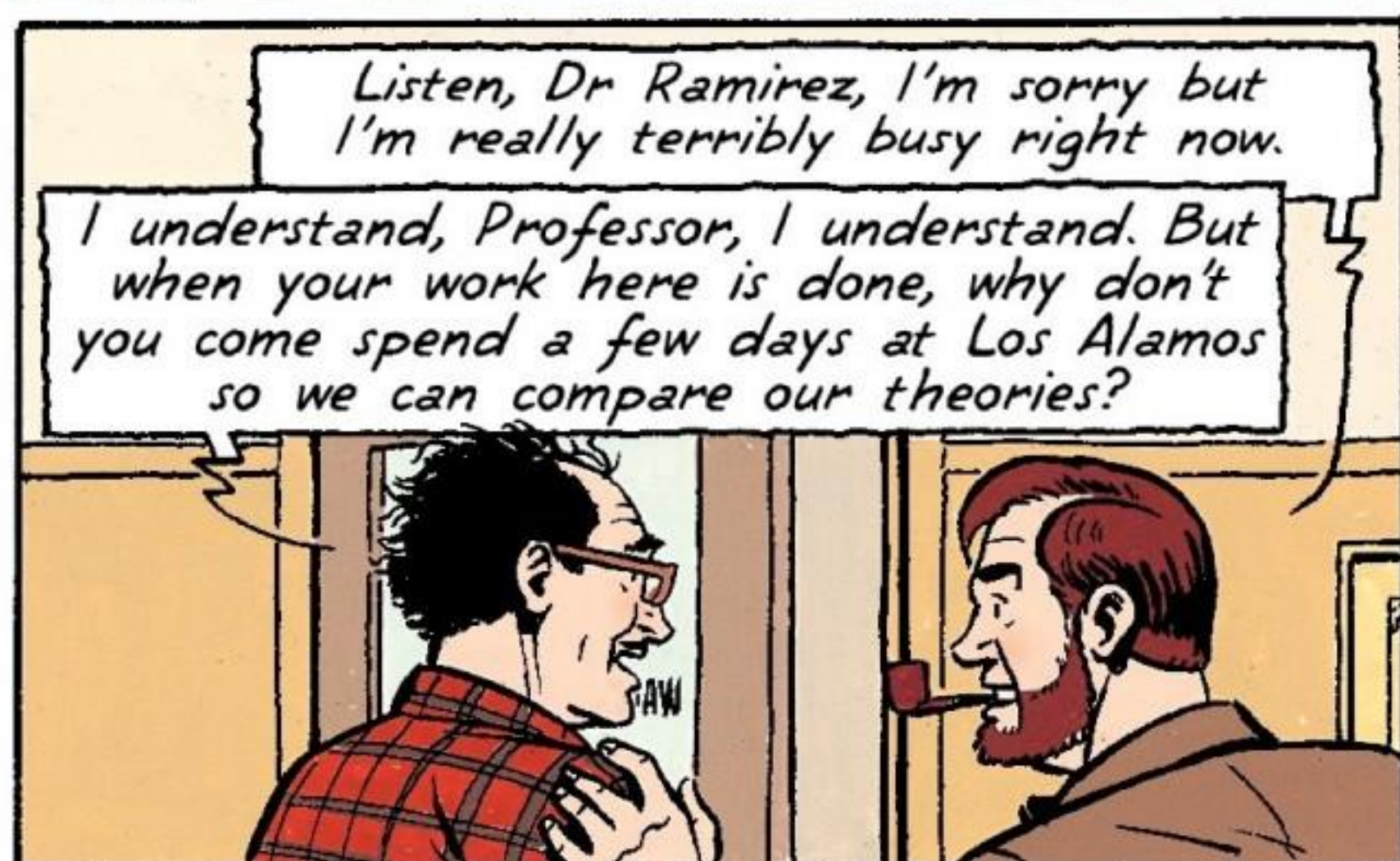
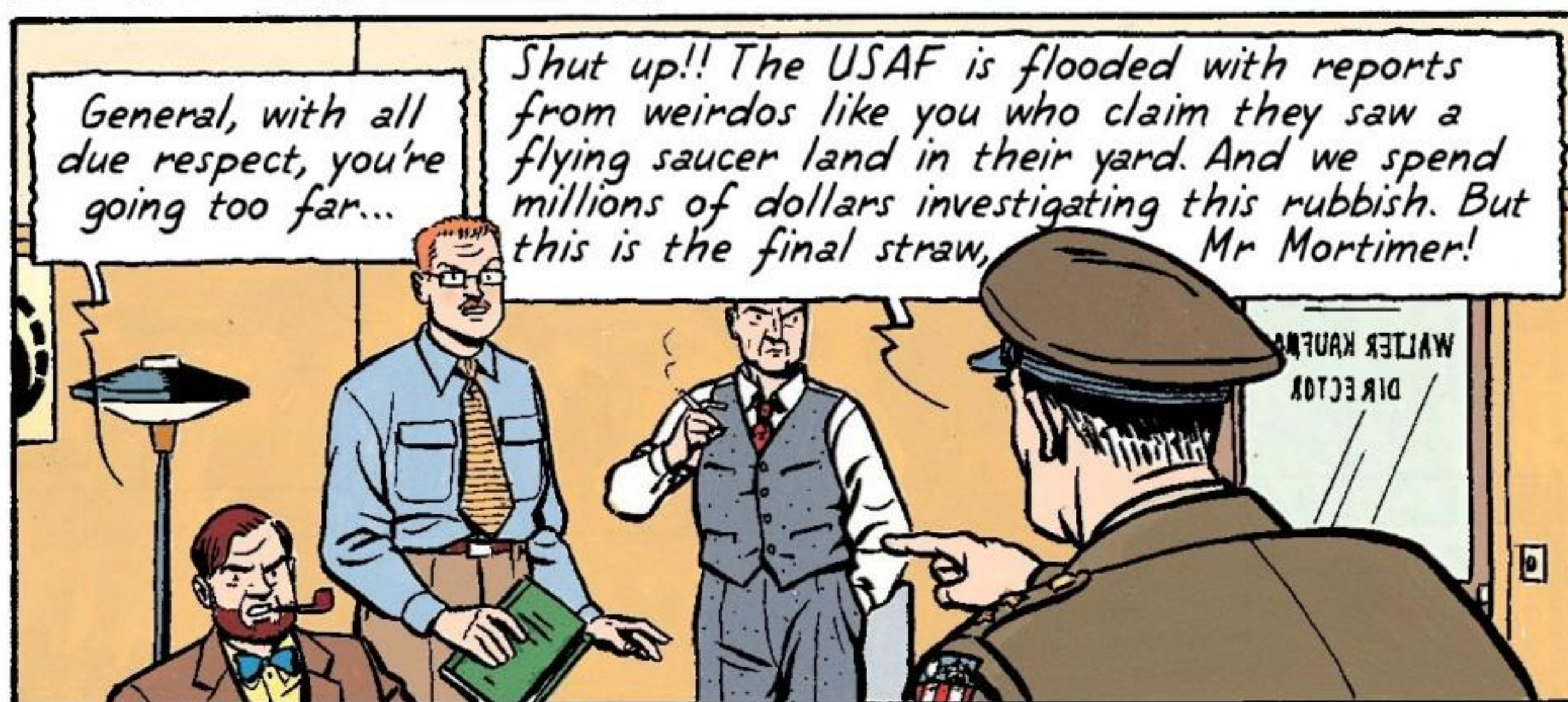
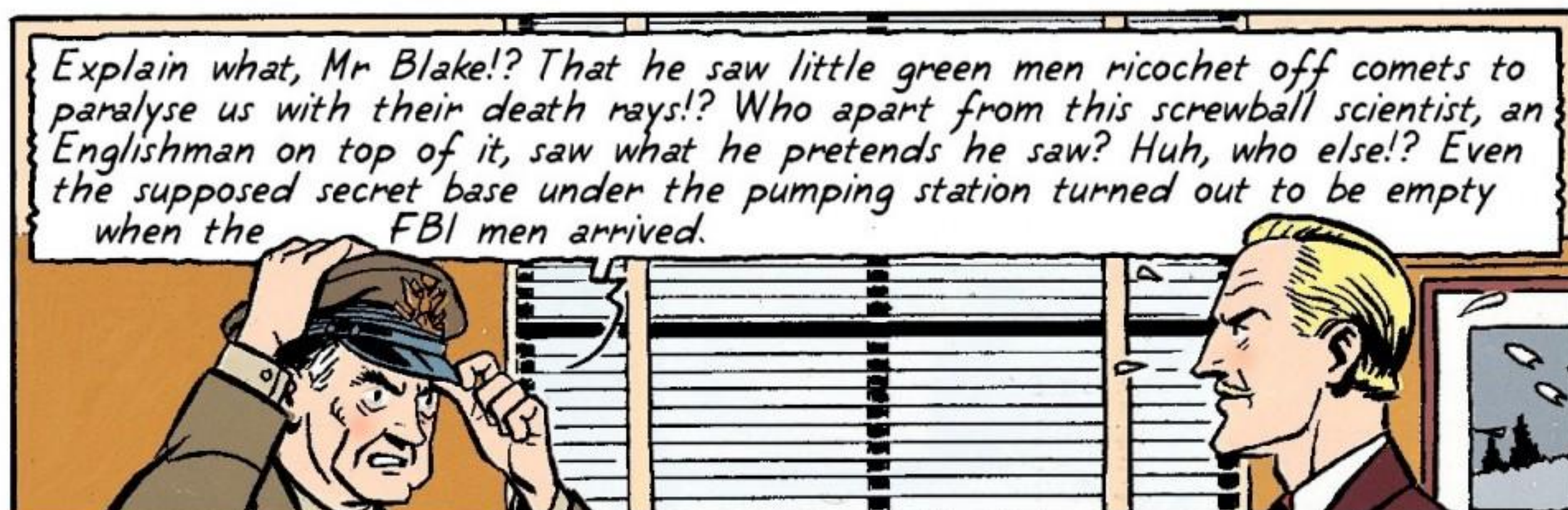
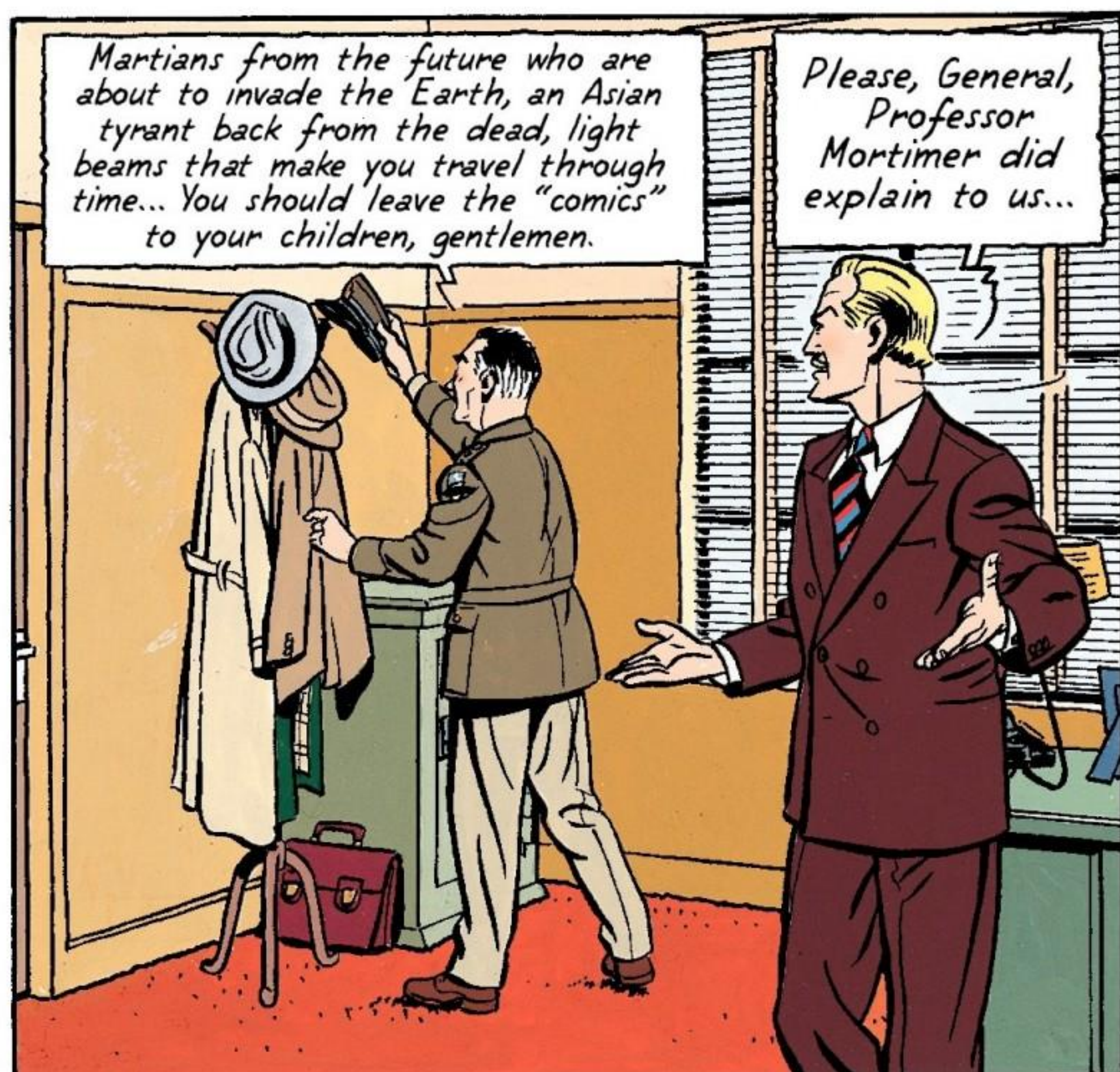
Which is in less than two days.

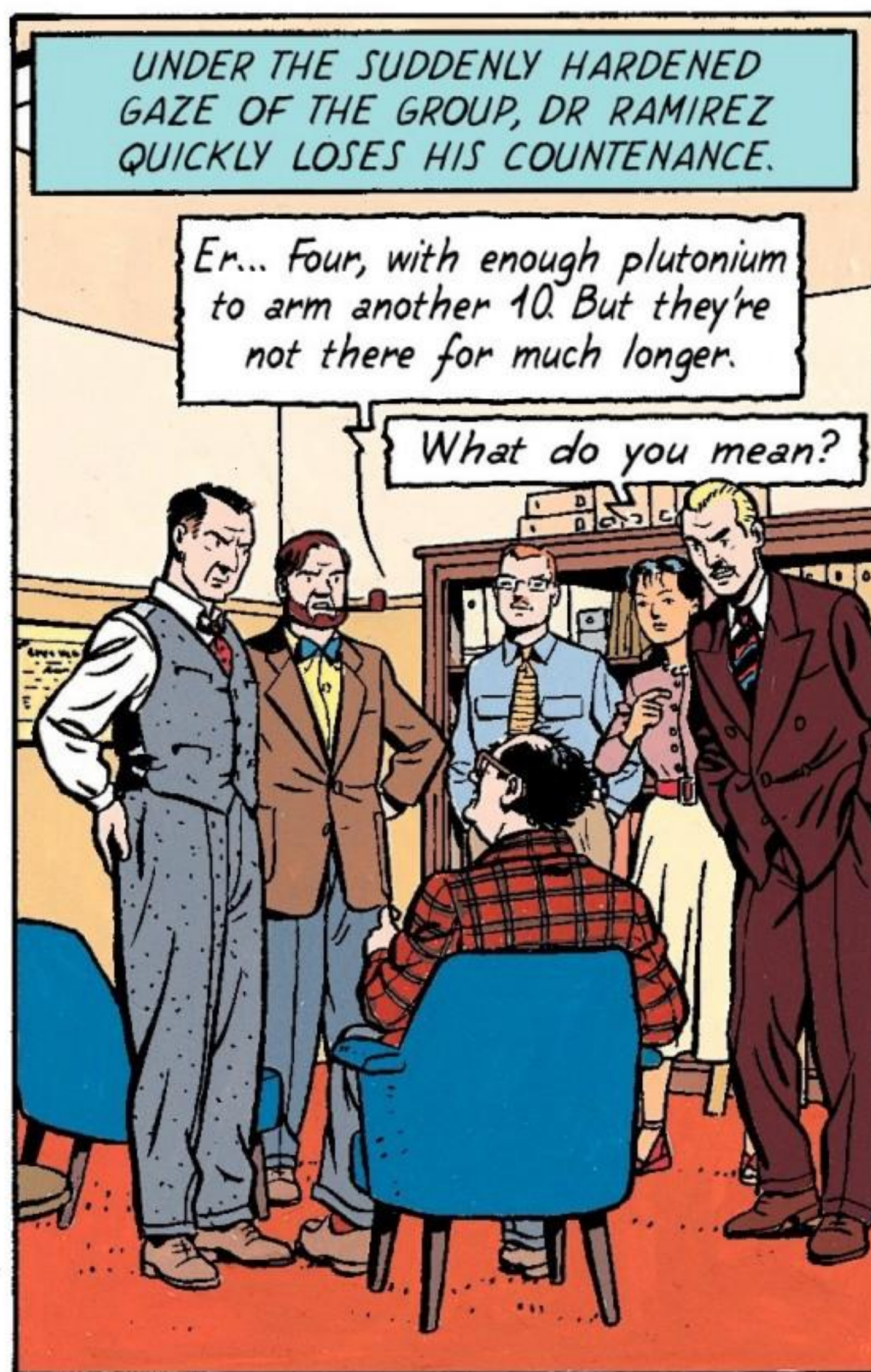
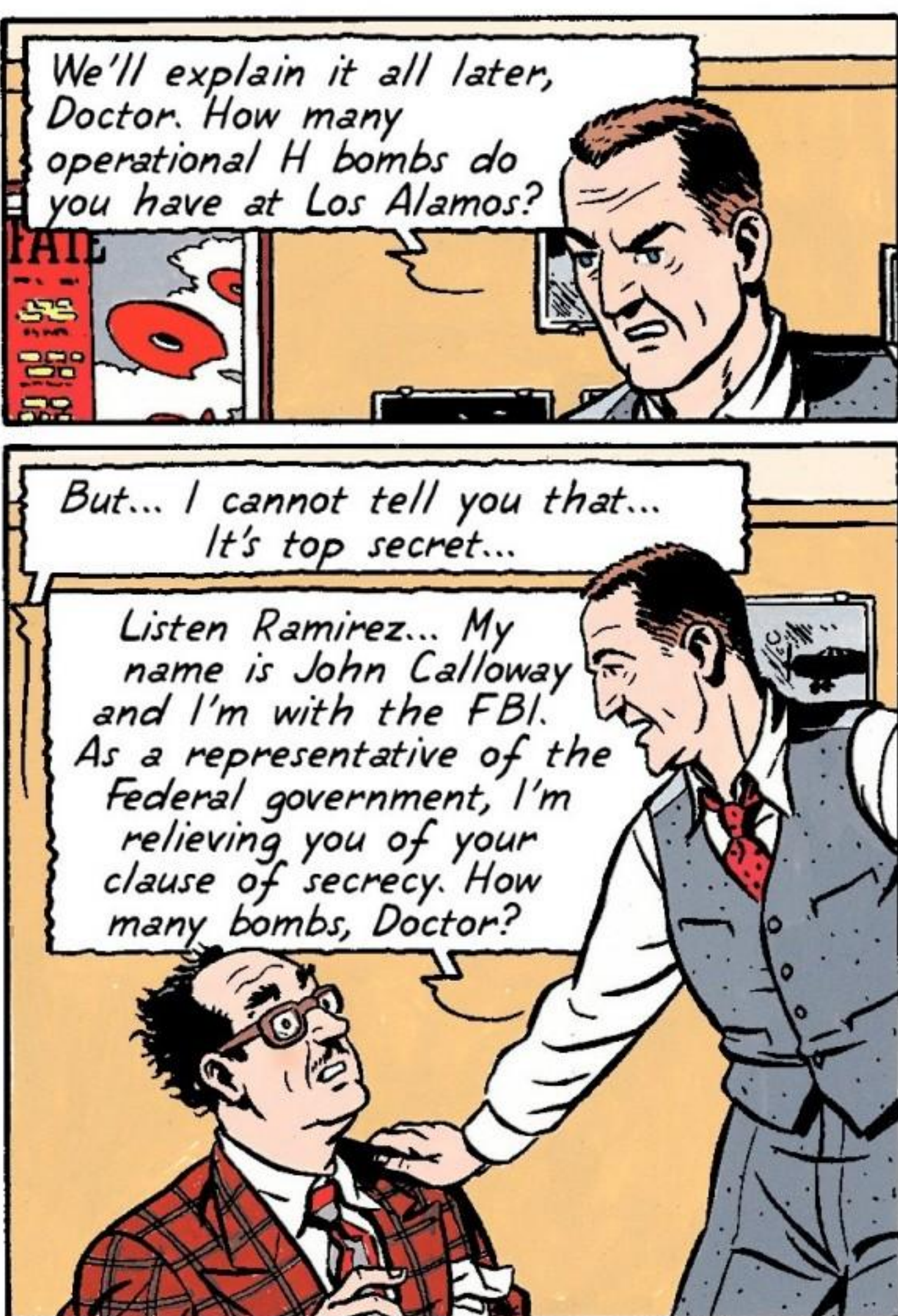
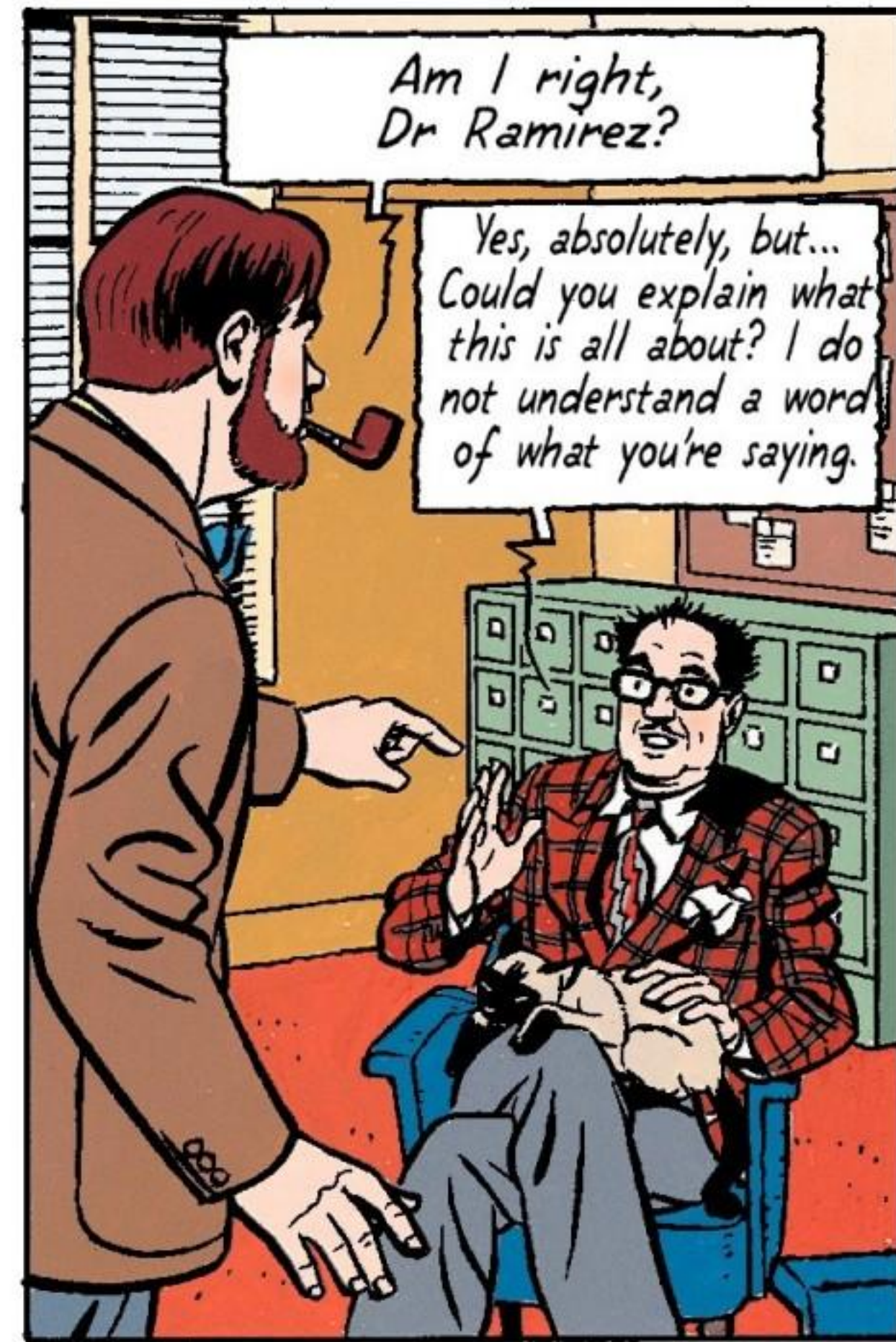
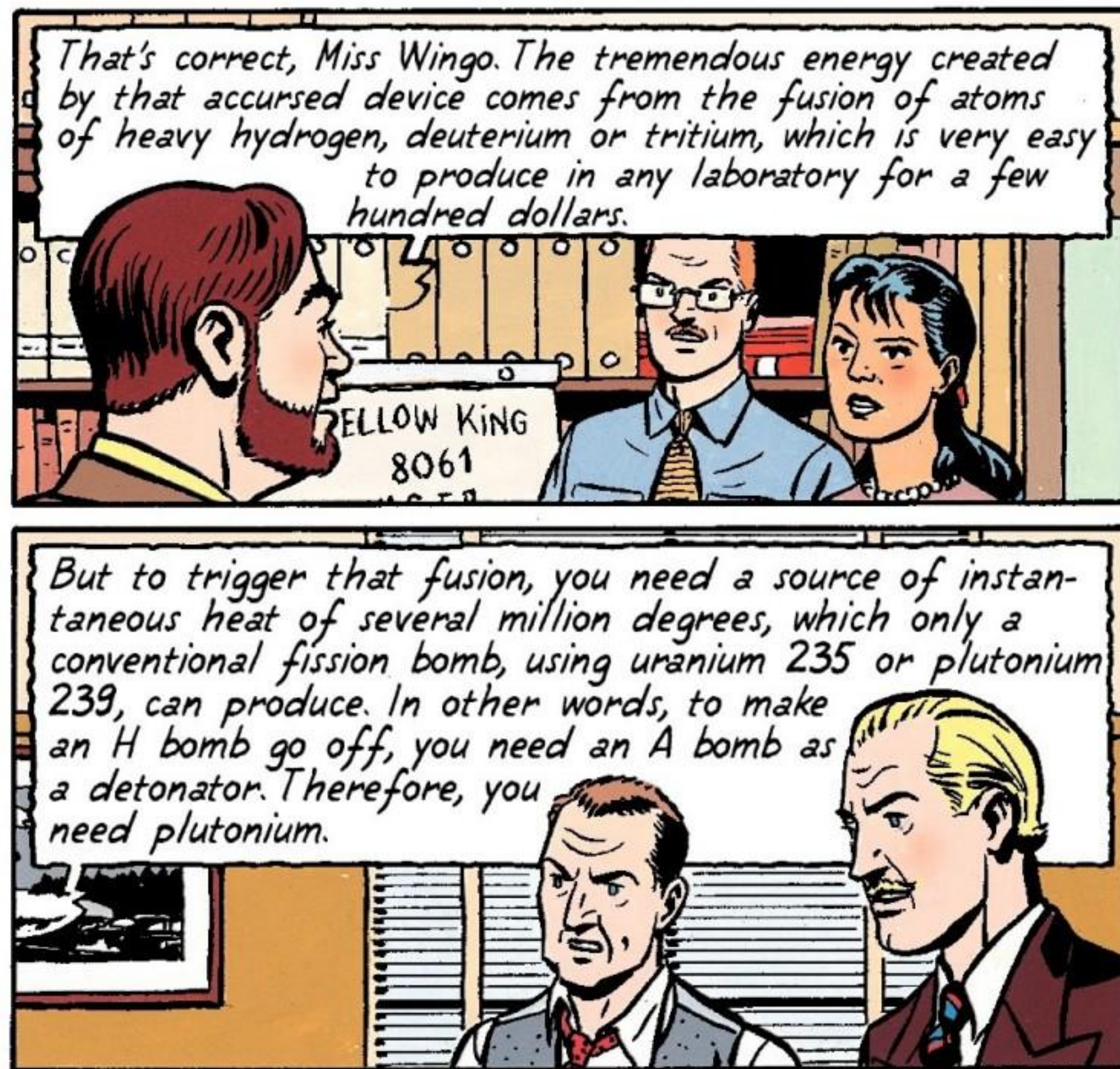
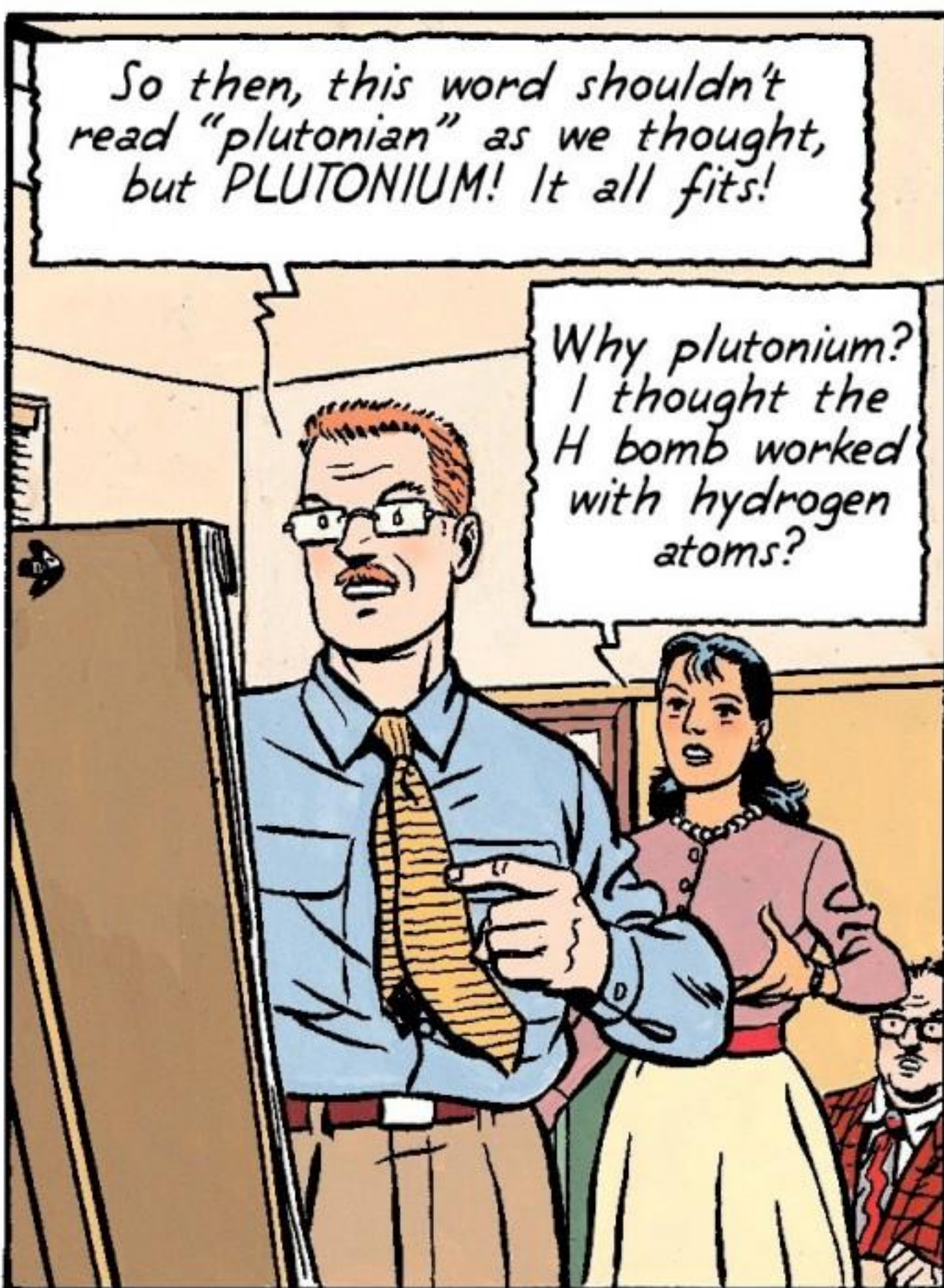
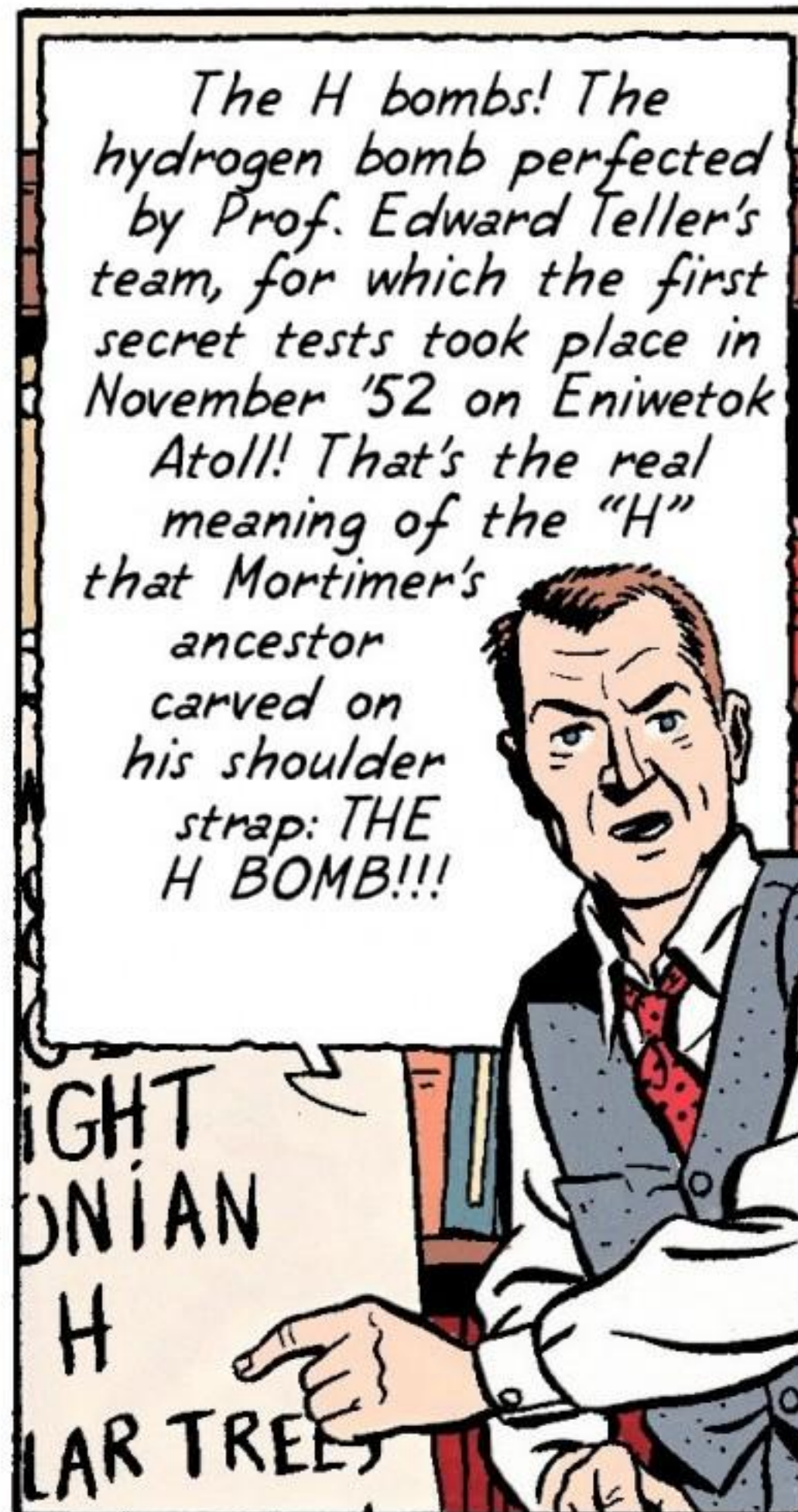
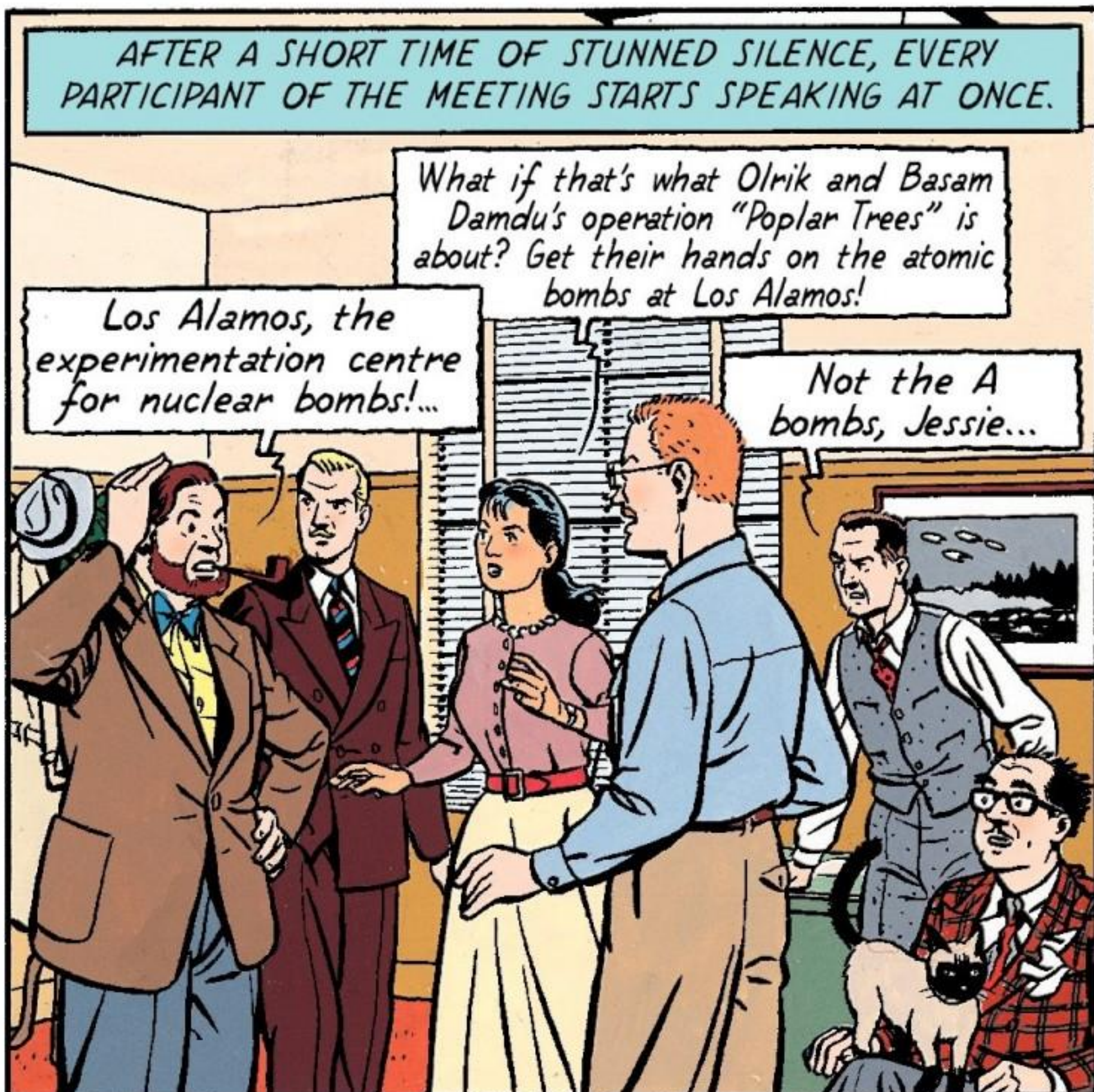


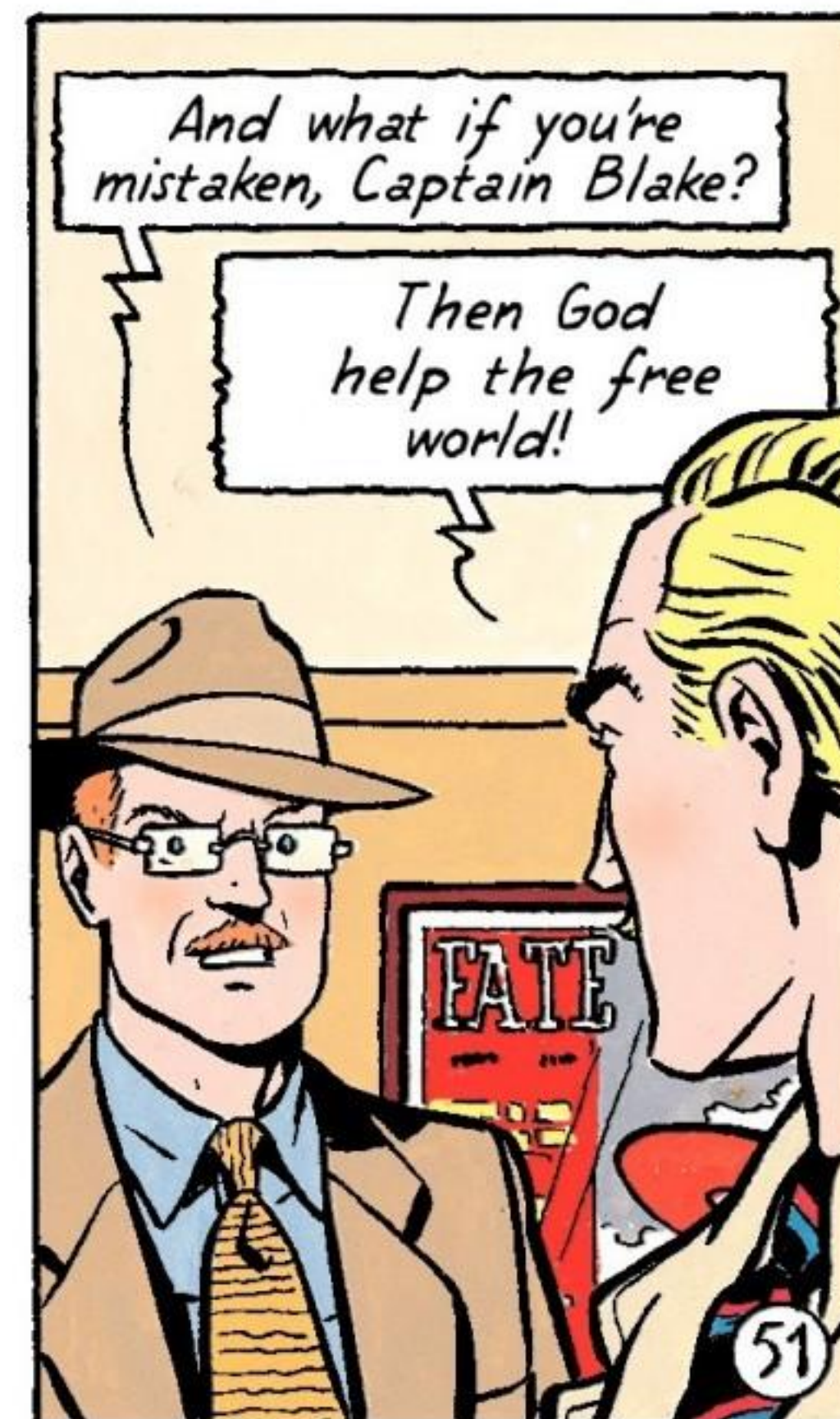
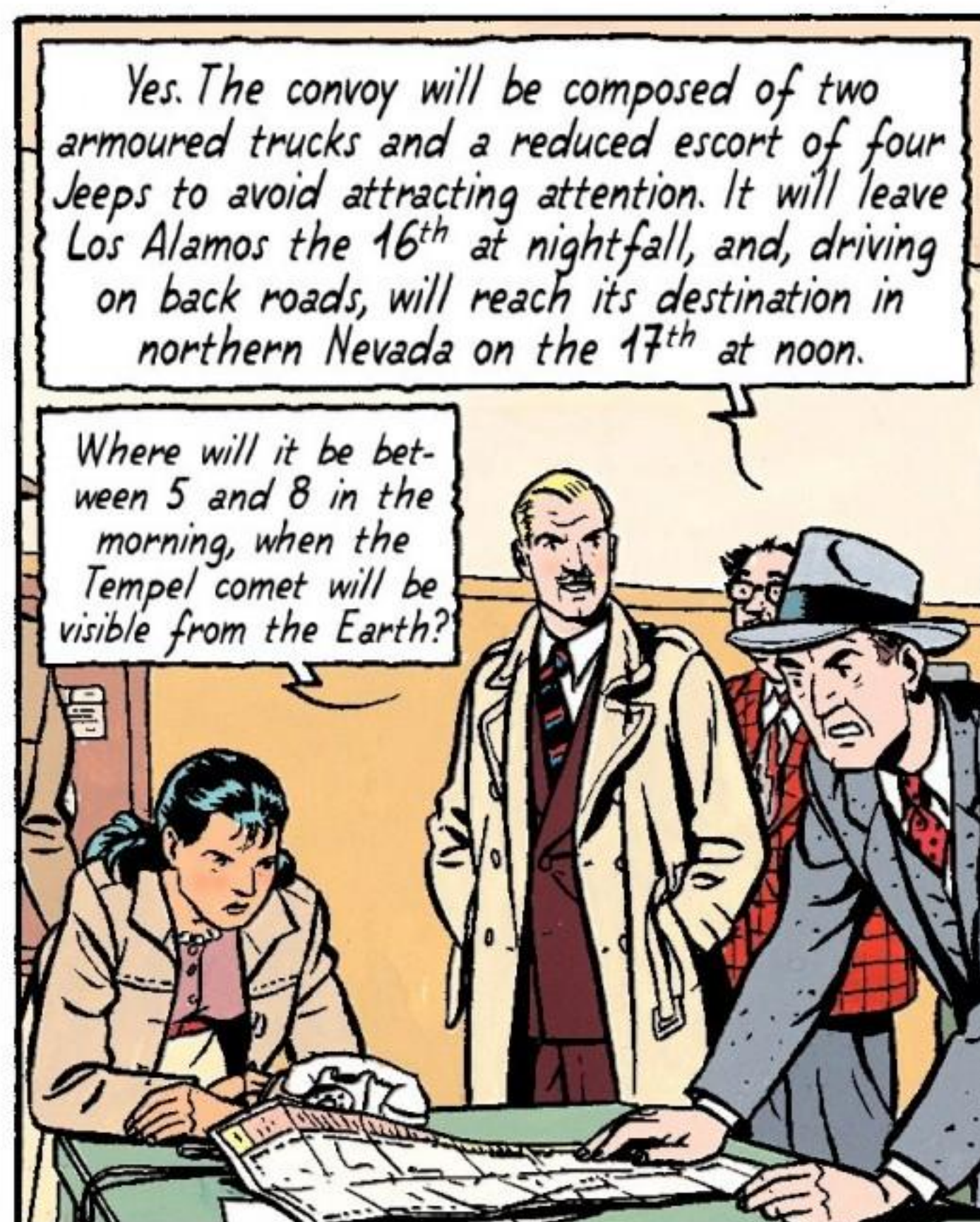
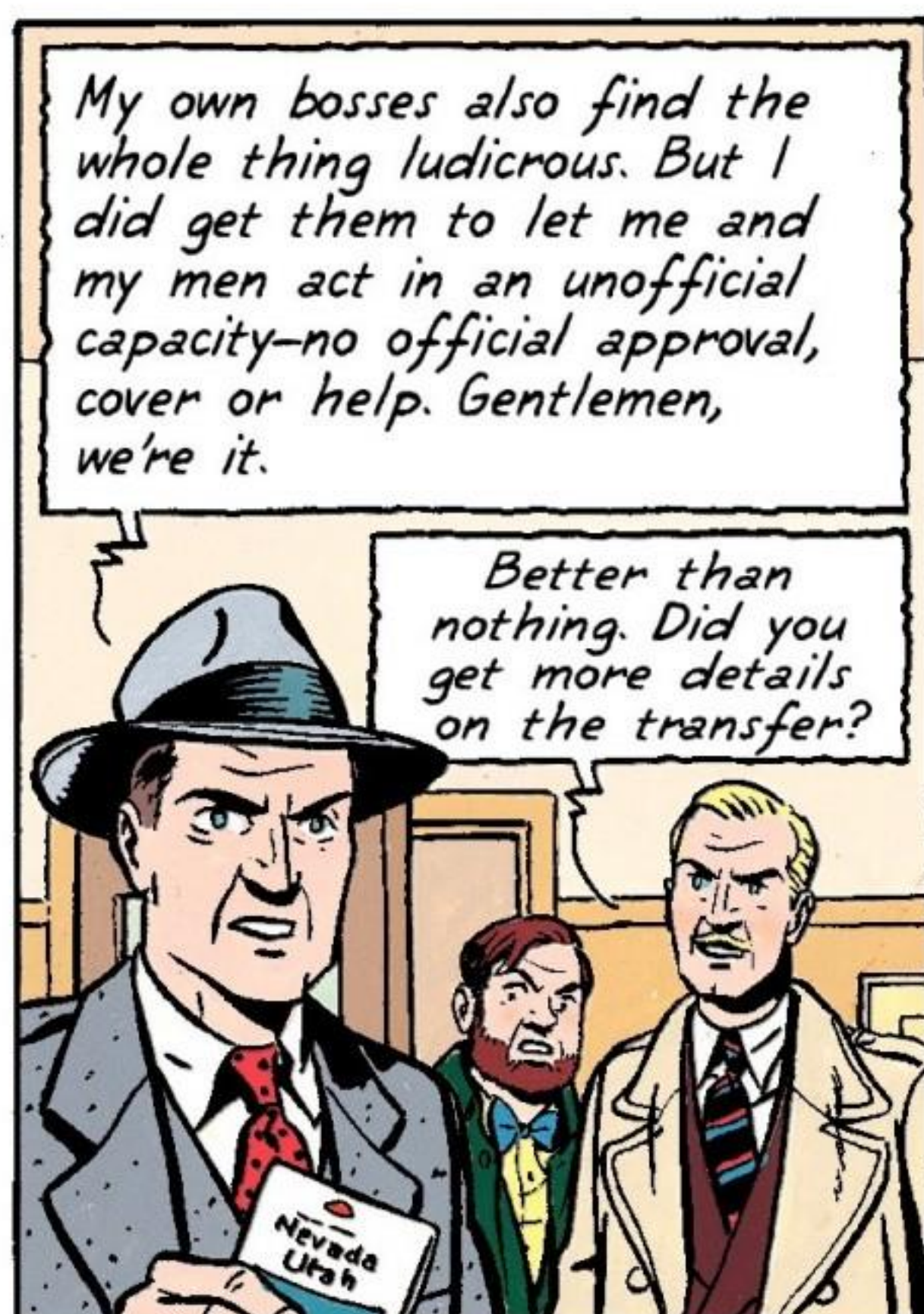
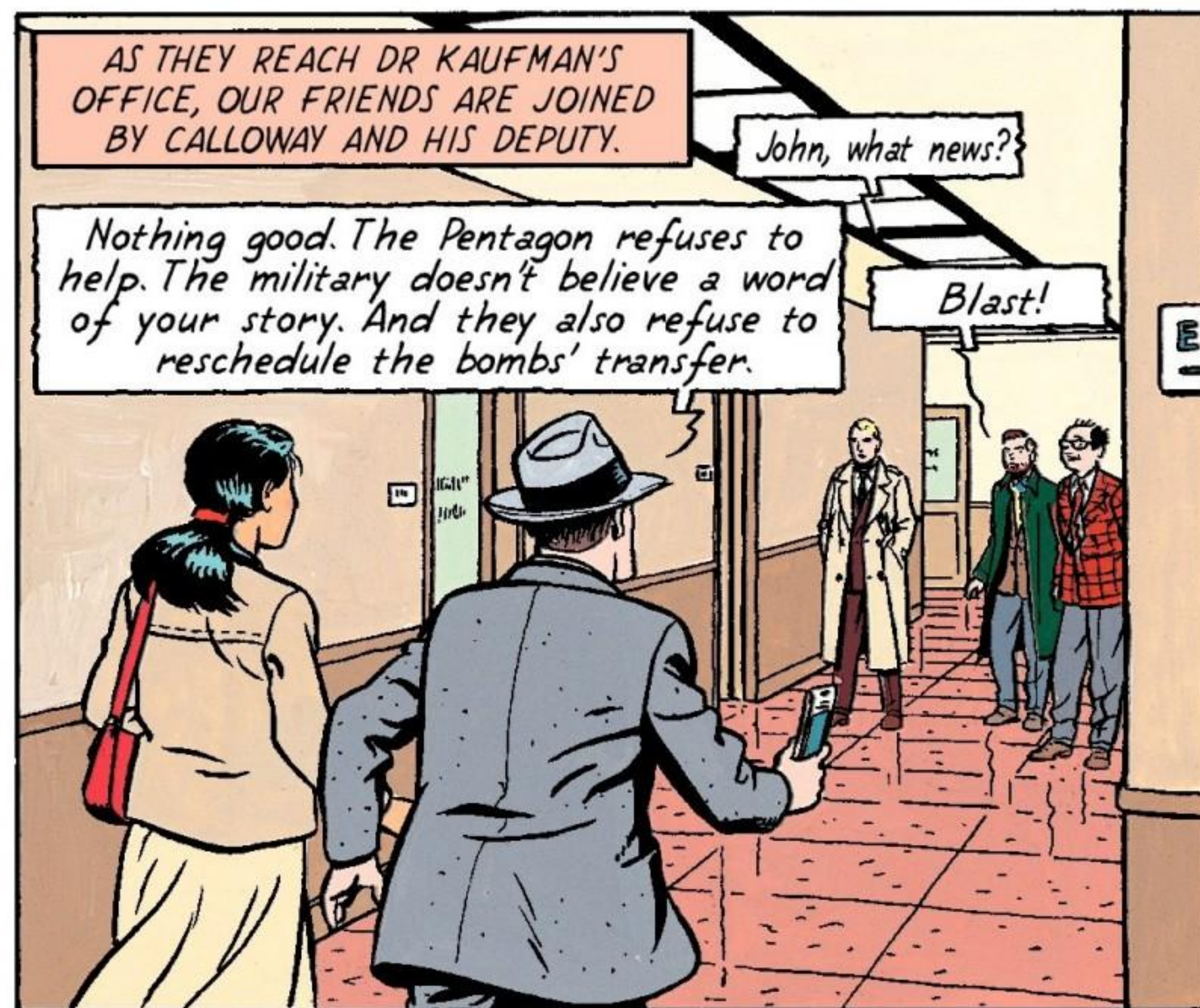
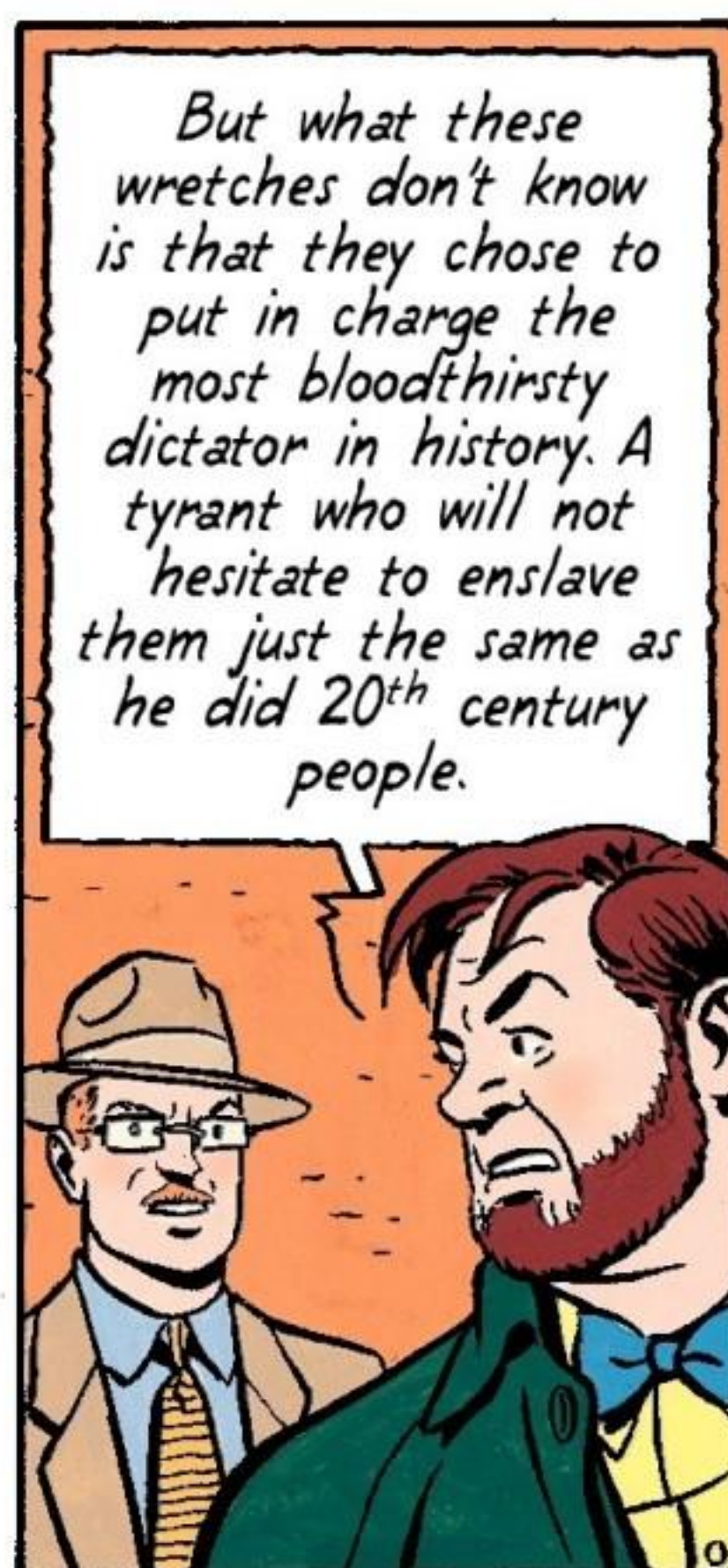
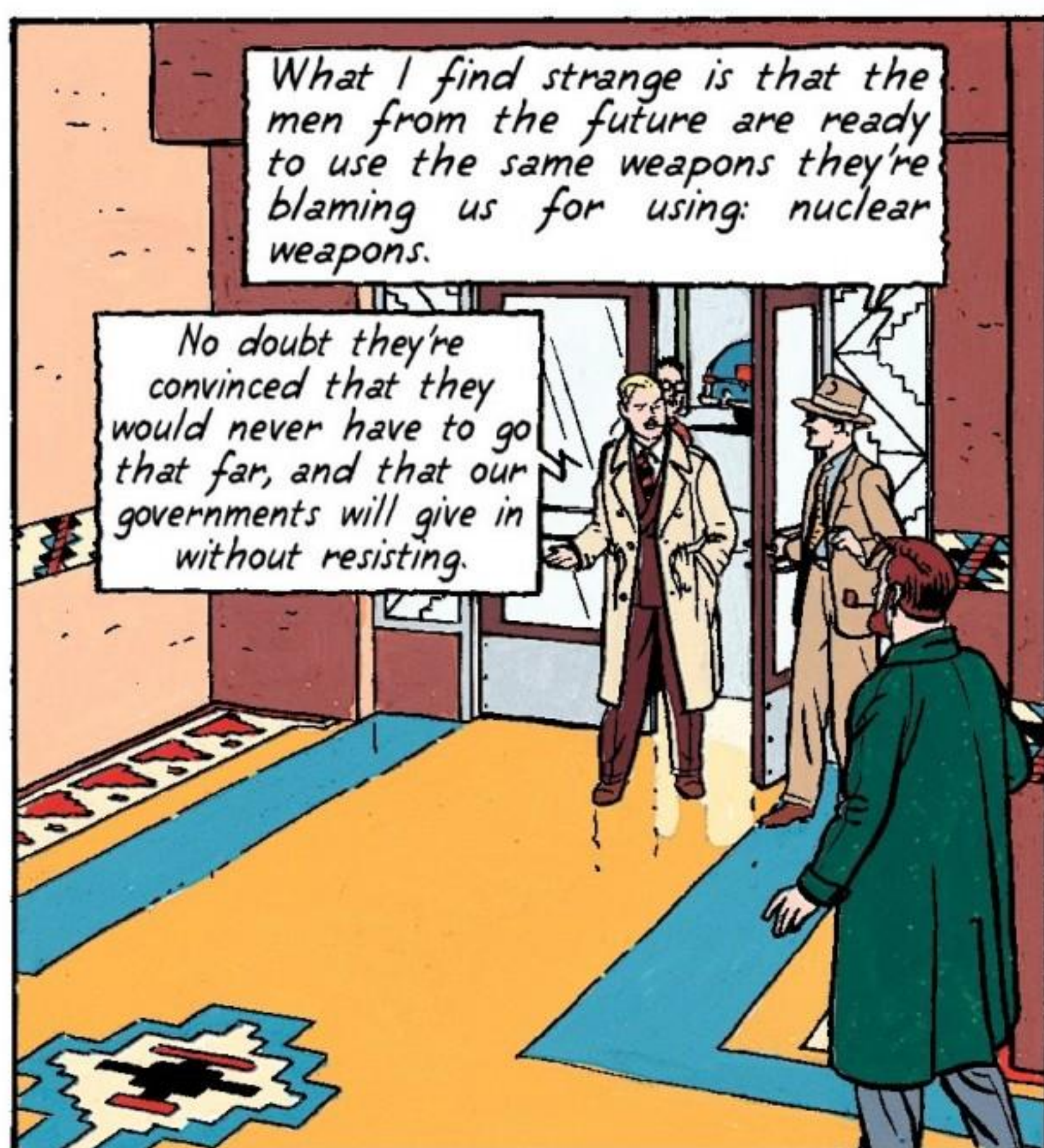
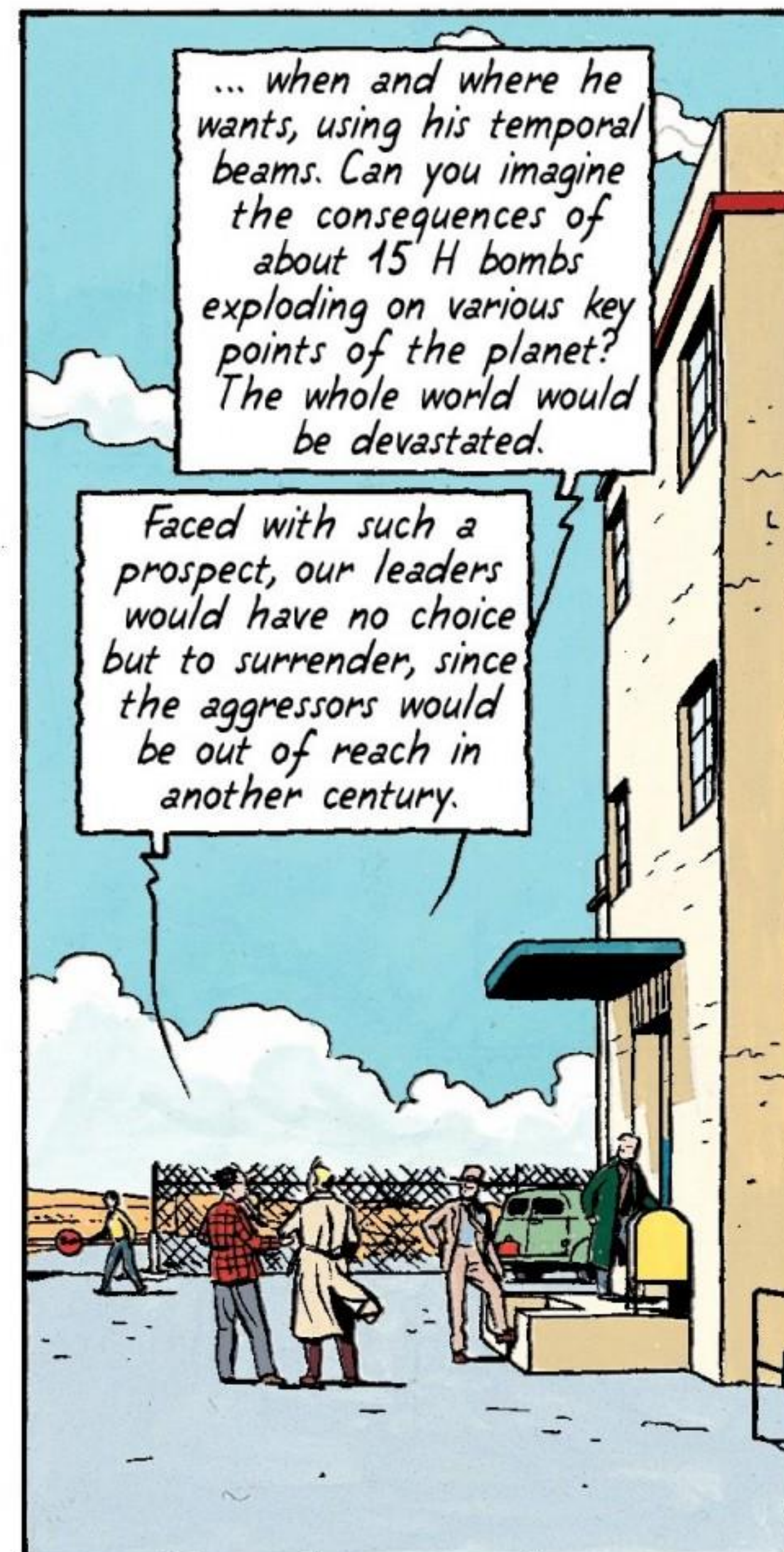
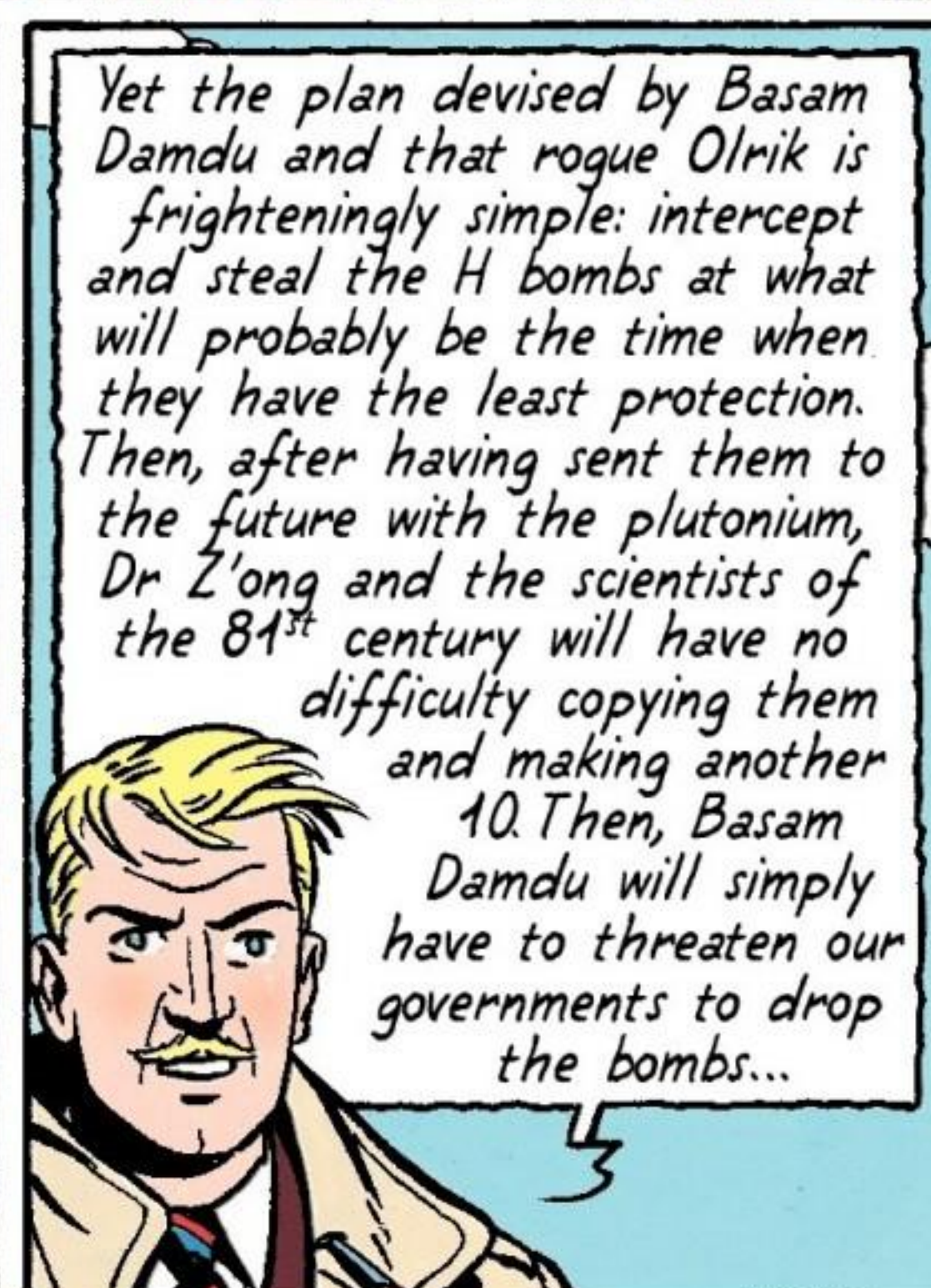
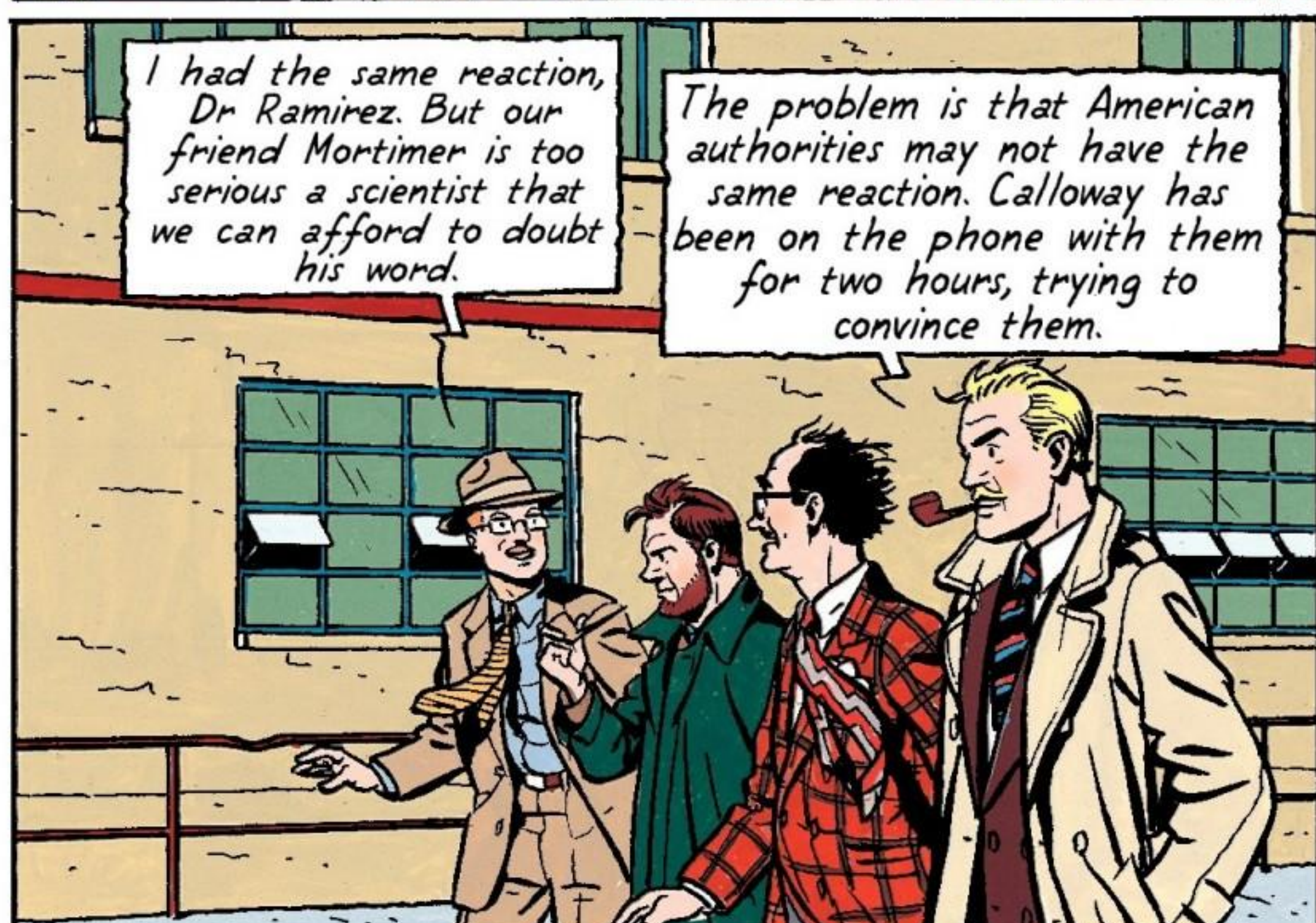
It's only a theory, of course.

Theory, my foot! If you want my opinion, everything I've just heard in this room is nothing but a pile of drivel.

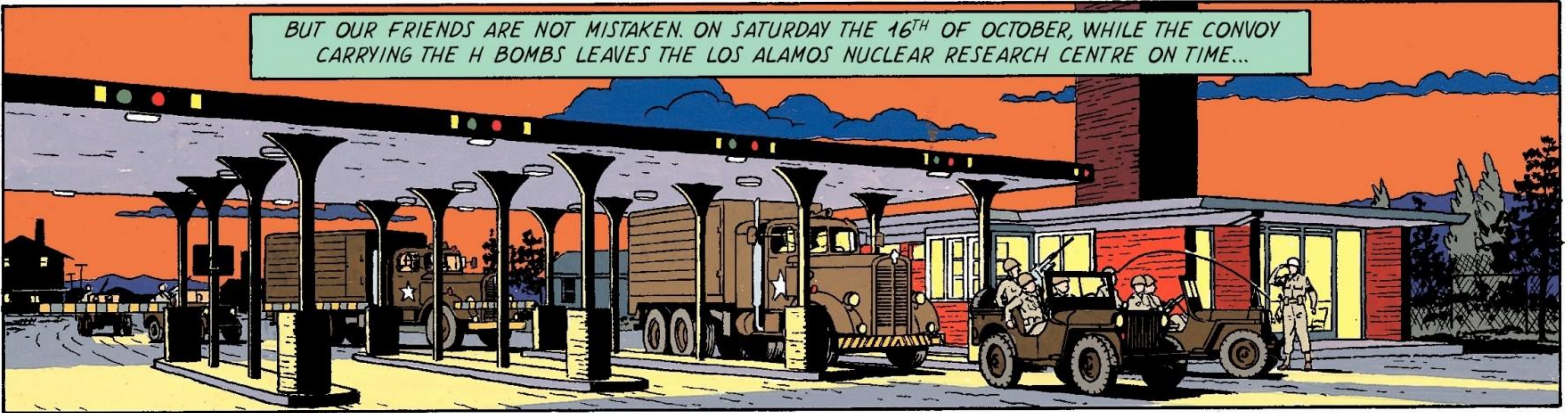






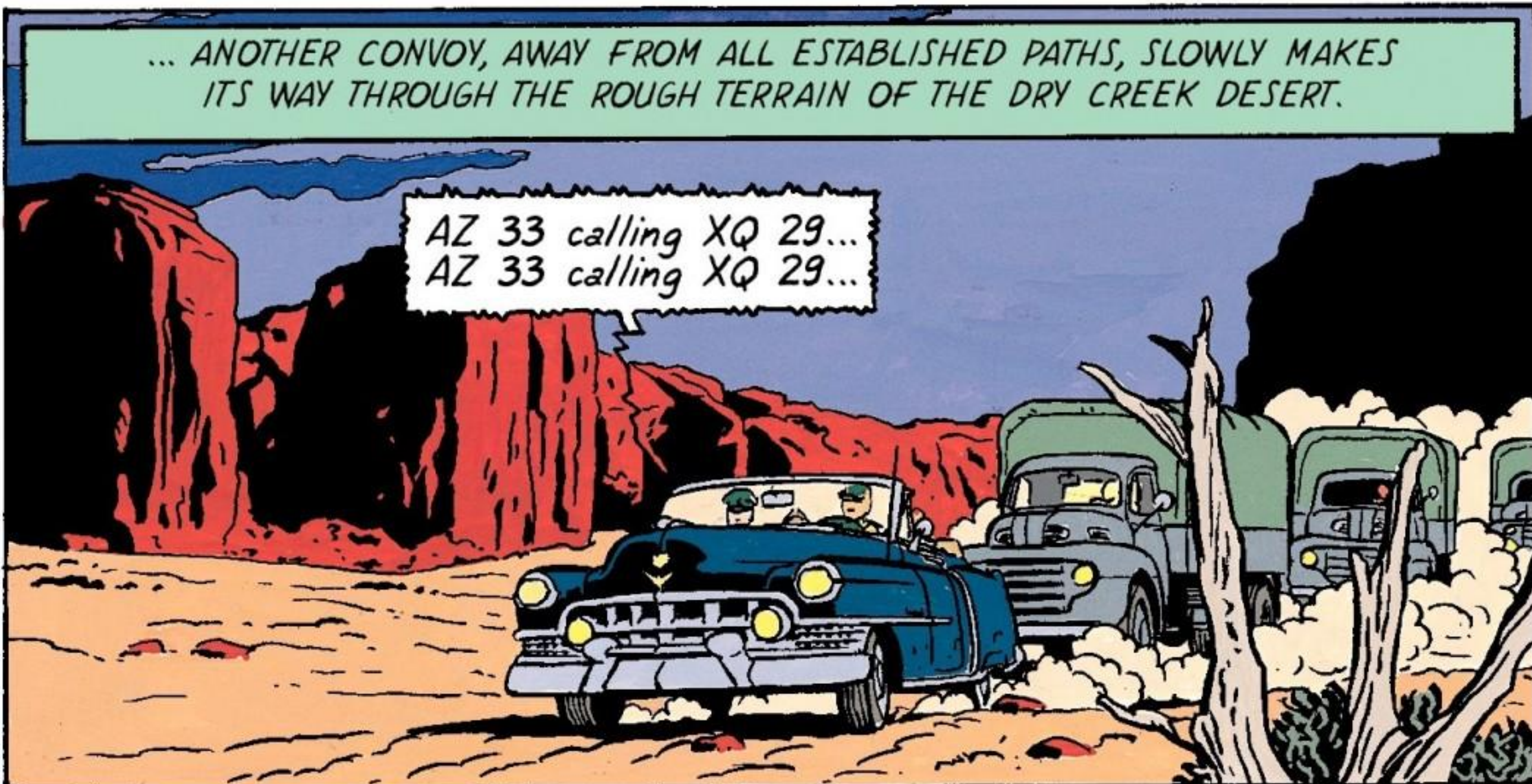


BUT OUR FRIENDS ARE NOT MISTAKEN. ON SATURDAY THE 16TH OF OCTOBER, WHILE THE CONVOY CARRYING THE H BOMBS LEAVES THE LOS ALAMOS NUCLEAR RESEARCH CENTRE ON TIME...



... ANOTHER CONVOY, AWAY FROM ALL ESTABLISHED PATHS, SLOWLY MAKES ITS WAY THROUGH THE ROUGH TERRAIN OF THE DRY CREEK DESERT.

AZ 33 calling XQ 29...
AZ 33 calling XQ 29...



This is XQ 29. Go ahead AZ 33.



Our friends have left on time. I repeat: Our friends have left on time. As expected, we'll have 16 for breakfast.

Acknowledged, AZ 33. Get to your evacuation point. We'll take care of the rest.

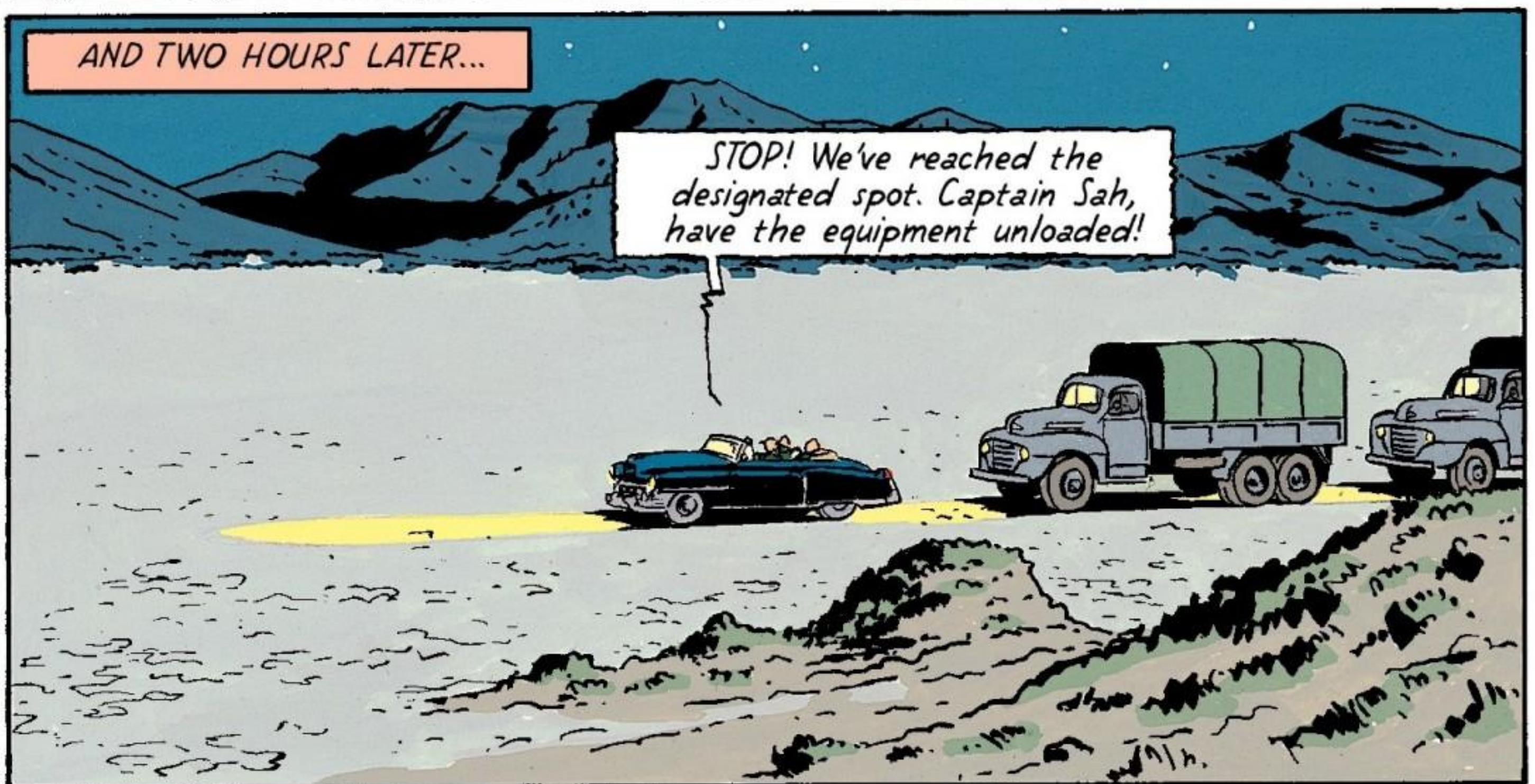


Gentlemen, the deal is as good as done!



AND TWO HOURS LATER...

STOP! We've reached the designated spot. Captain Sah, have the equipment unloaded!



MEANWHILE, 20 MILES FURTHER WEST...

They've stopped!

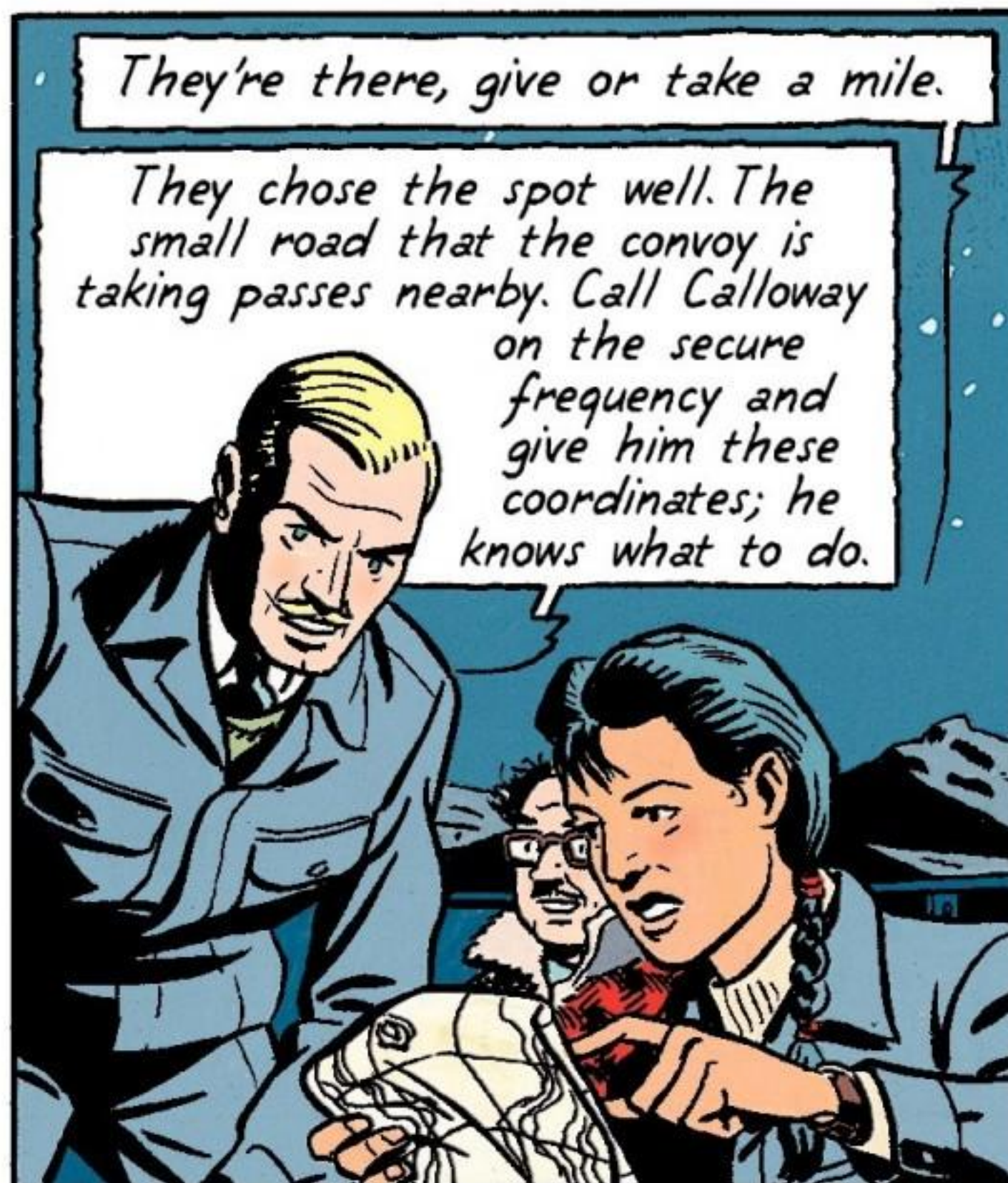




This long-range ground radar is quite amazing, Miss Wingo.

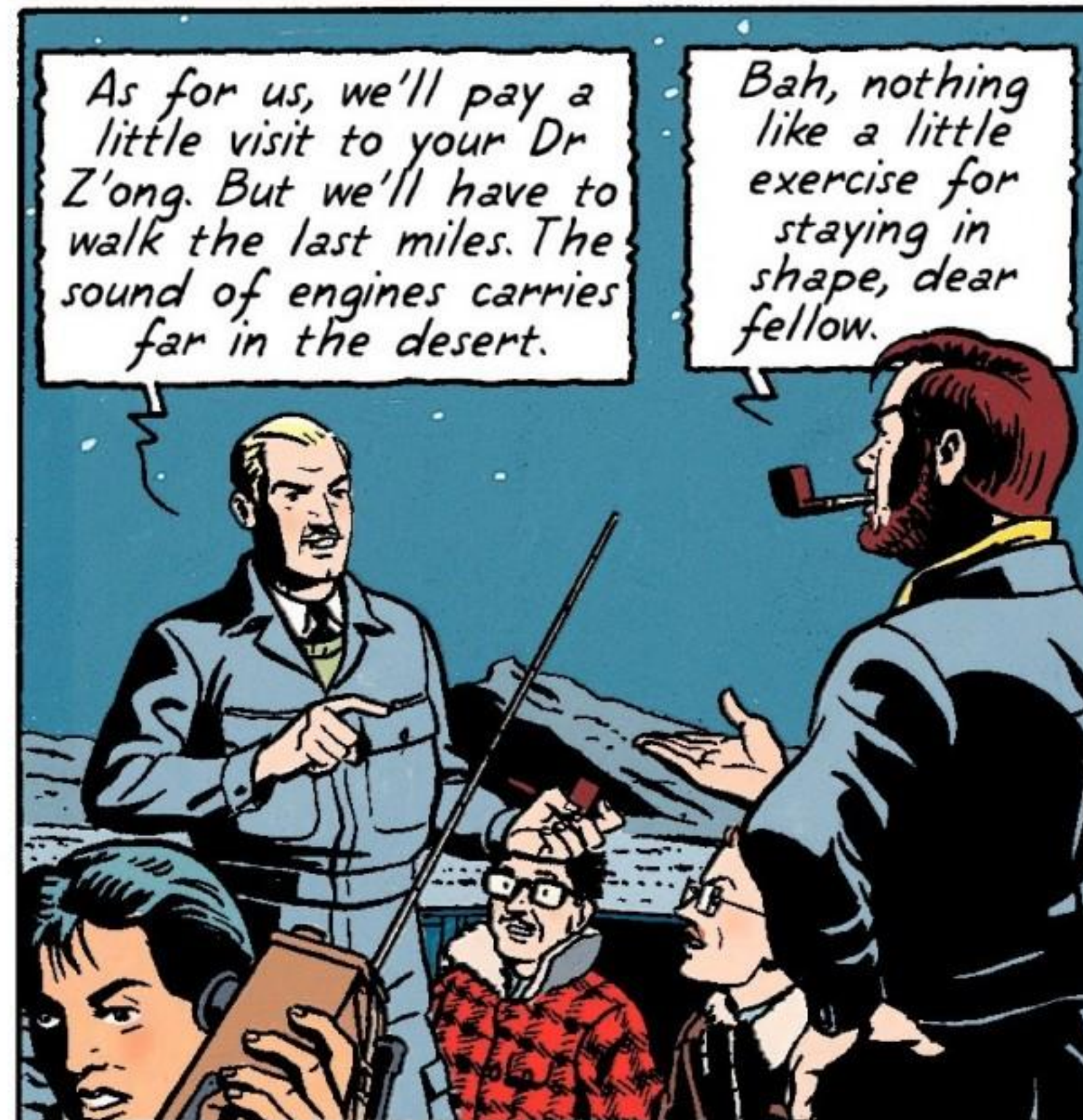
The FBI is equipped with nothing but the best, Professor.

If only that were true of the Intelligence Service as well. Can you calculate their position?



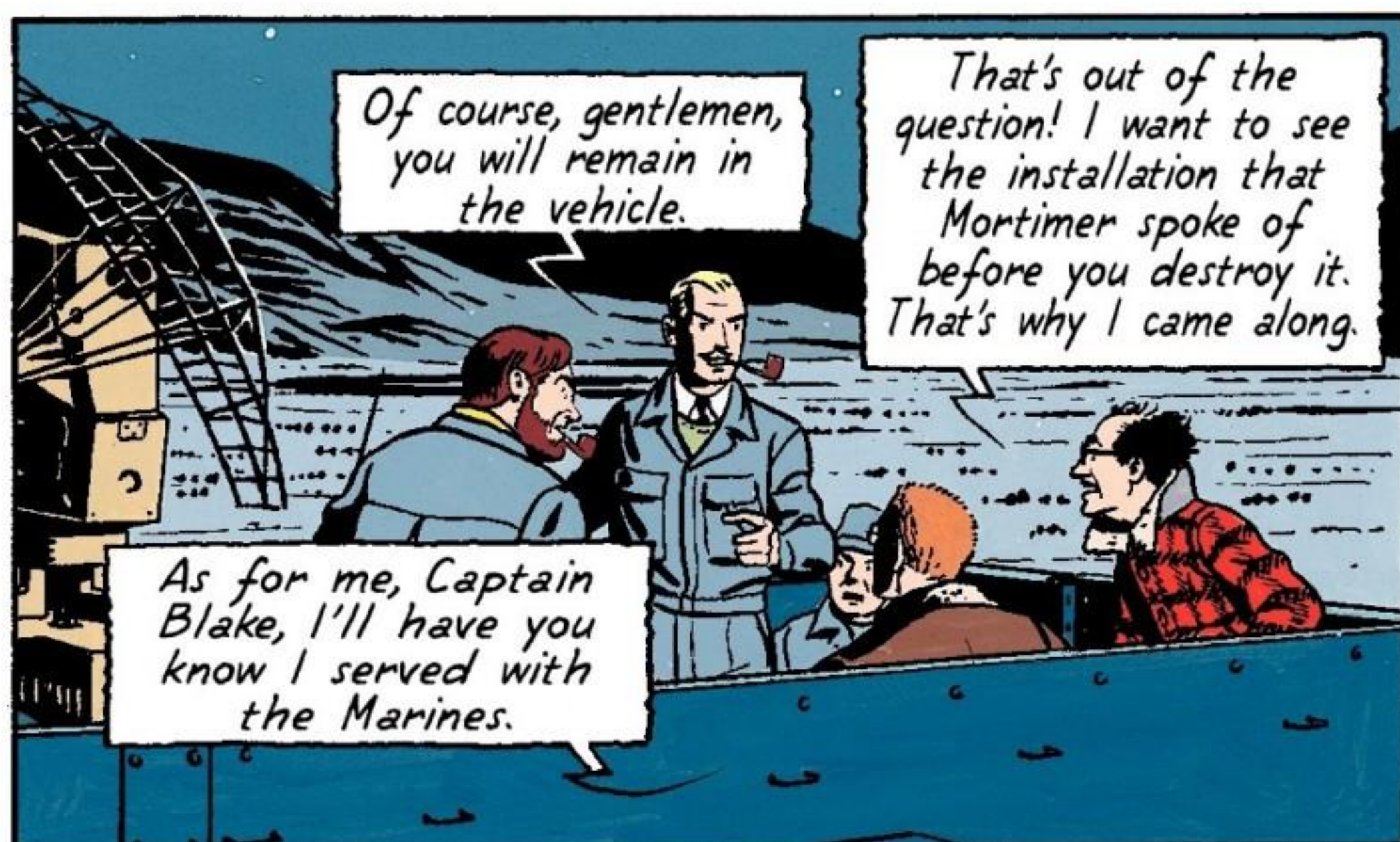
They're there, give or take a mile.

They chose the spot well. The small road that the convoy is taking passes nearby. Call Calloway on the secure frequency and give him these coordinates; he knows what to do.



As for us, we'll pay a little visit to your Dr Z'ong. But we'll have to walk the last miles. The sound of engines carries far in the desert.

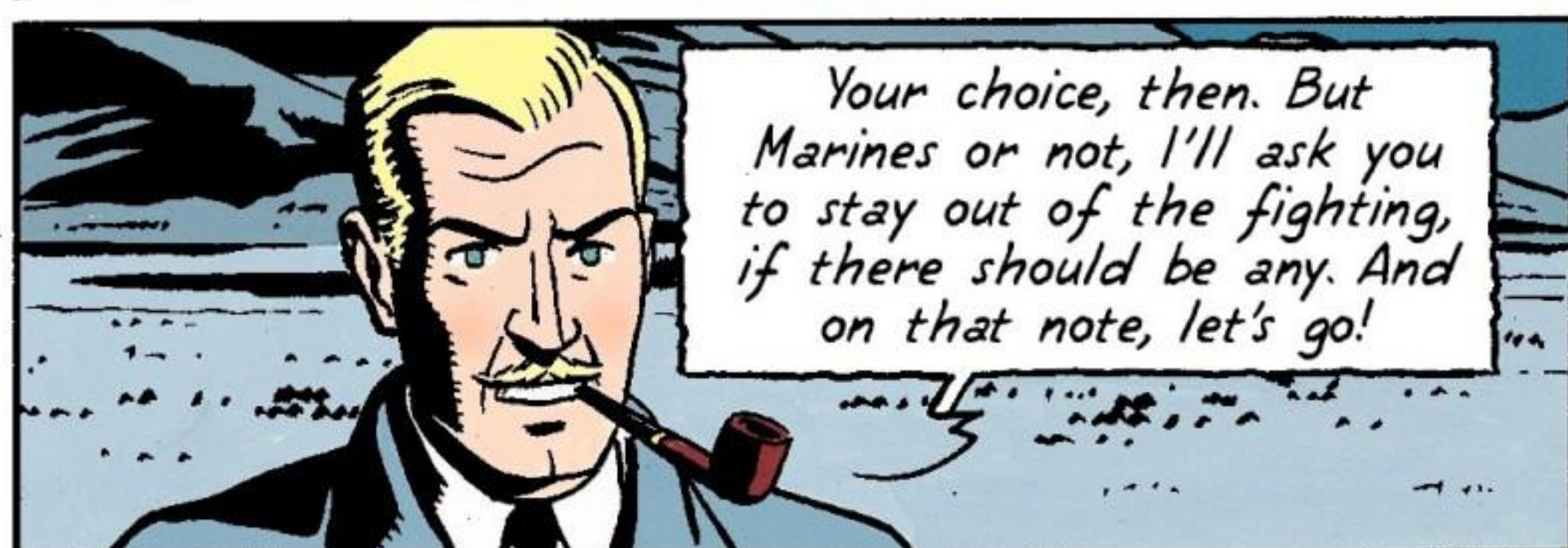
Bah, nothing like a little exercise for staying in shape, dear fellow.



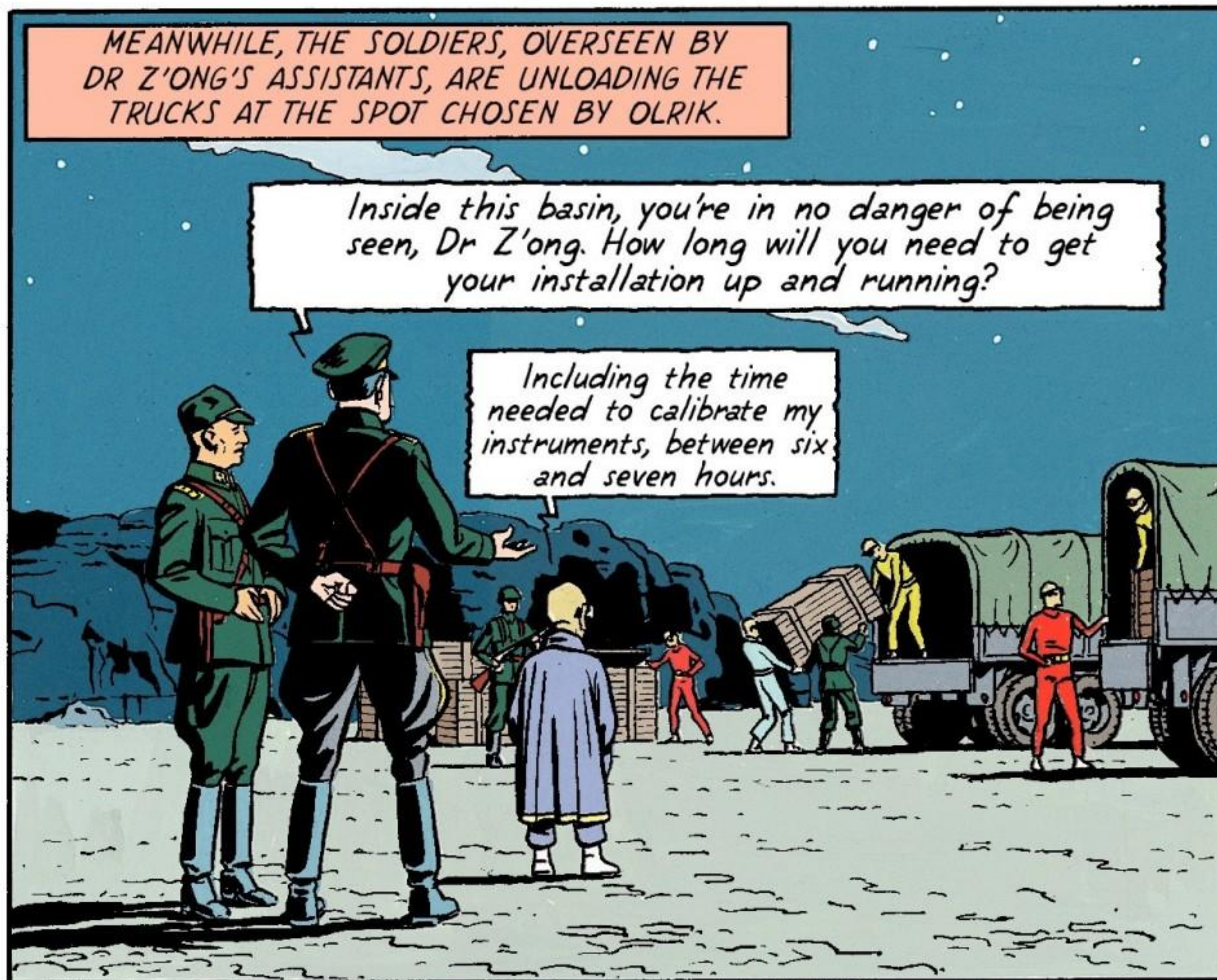
Of course, gentlemen, you will remain in the vehicle.

That's out of the question! I want to see the installation that Mortimer spoke of before you destroy it. That's why I came along.

As for me, Captain Blake, I'll have you know I served with the Marines.



Your choice, then. But Marines or not, I'll ask you to stay out of the fighting, if there should be any. And on that note, let's go!



MEANWHILE, THE SOLDIERS, OVERSEEN BY DR Z'ONG'S ASSISTANTS, ARE UNLOADING THE TRUCKS AT THE SPOT CHOSEN BY OLRİK.

Inside this basin, you're in no danger of being seen, Dr Z'ong. How long will you need to get your installation up and running?

Including the time needed to calibrate my instruments, between six and seven hours.



I strongly advise you to be ready on time, Doctor. You know as well as I do the stakes of this game.

Allow me to remind you, Colonel, that it is thanks to me that you can play this game at all.



Captain Sah, post sentries around the area and have your men get some rest as soon as they are finished unloading. We will leave the vehicles here and must be in position overlooking the road tomorrow morning at 5 am.

Yes, Colonel!



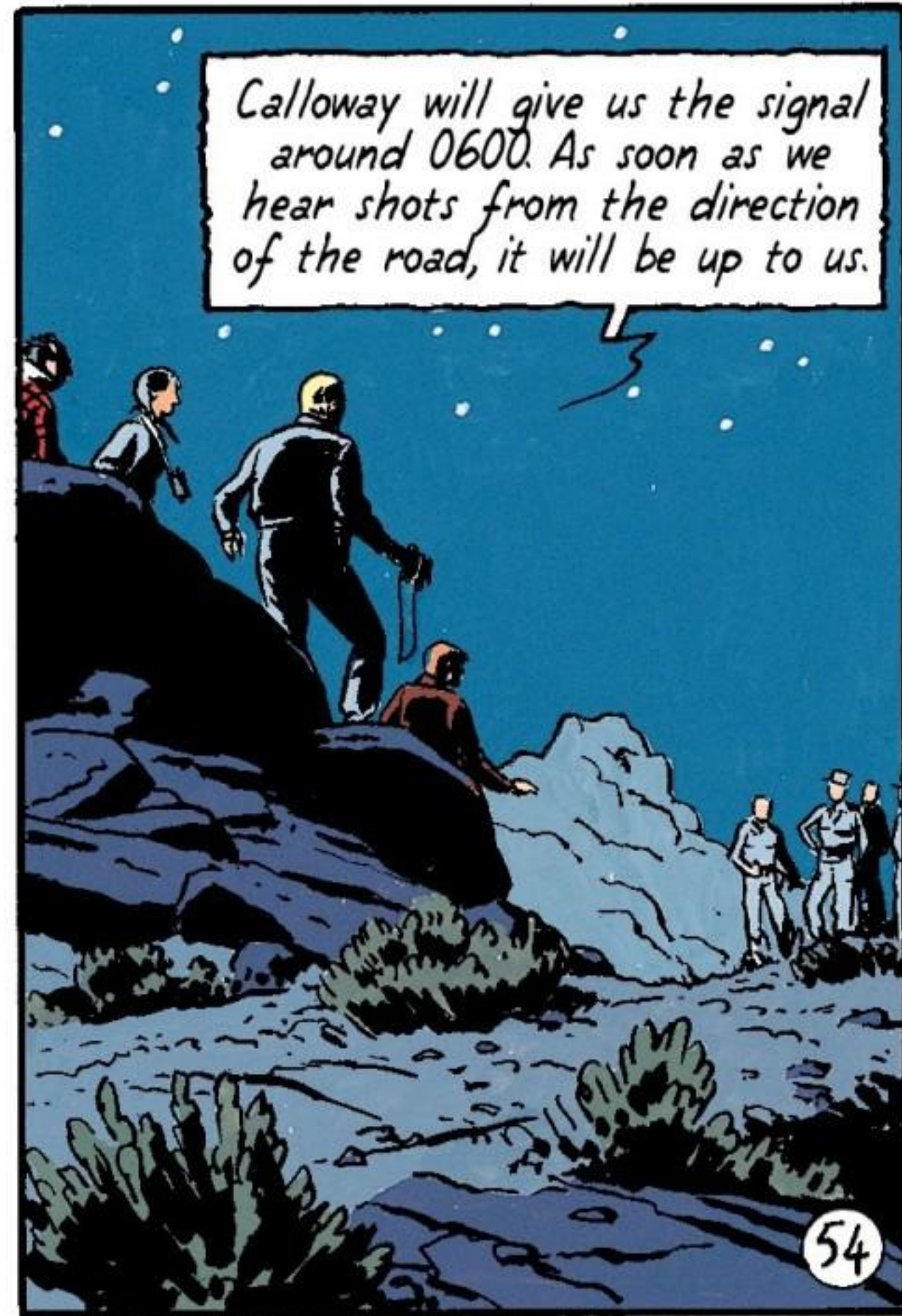
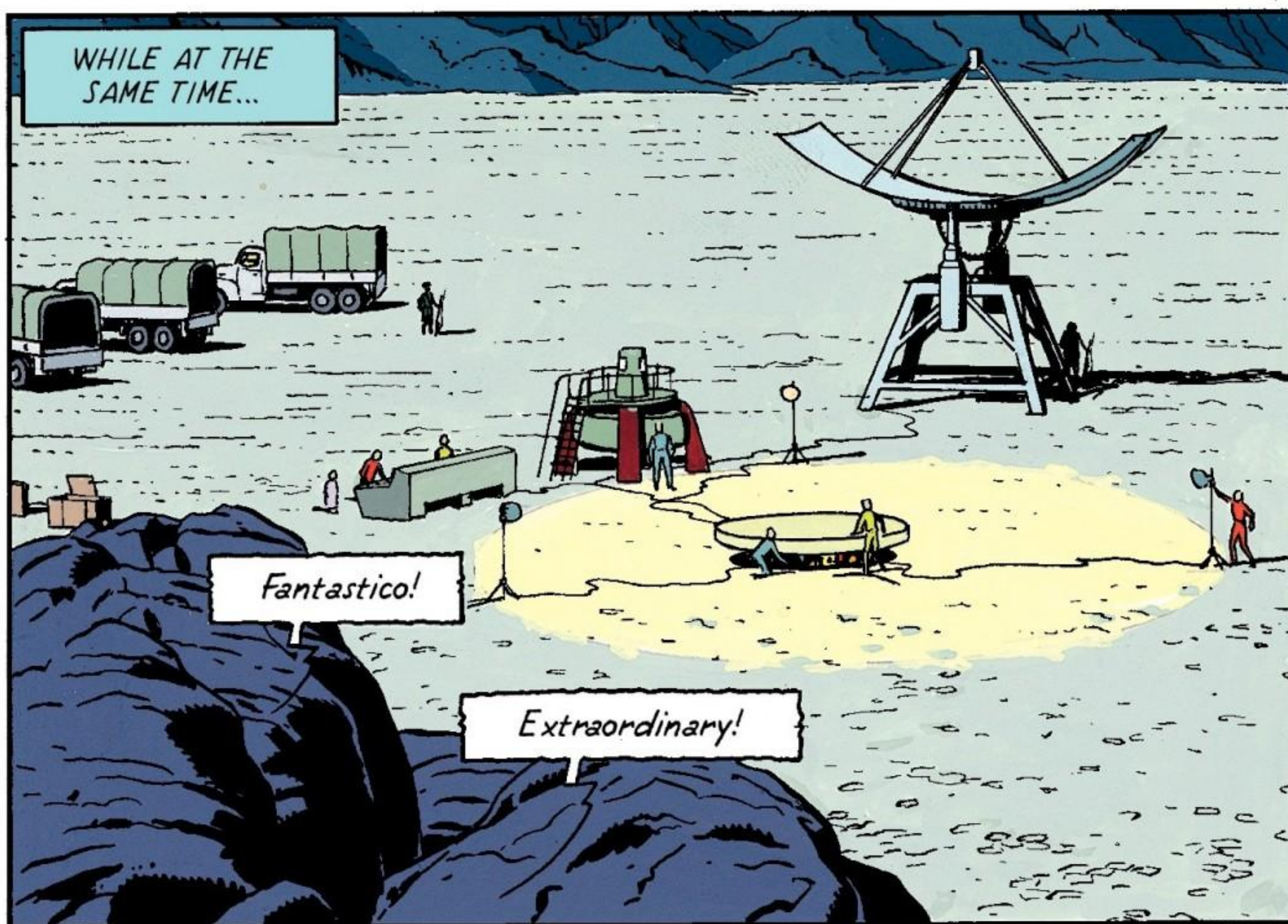
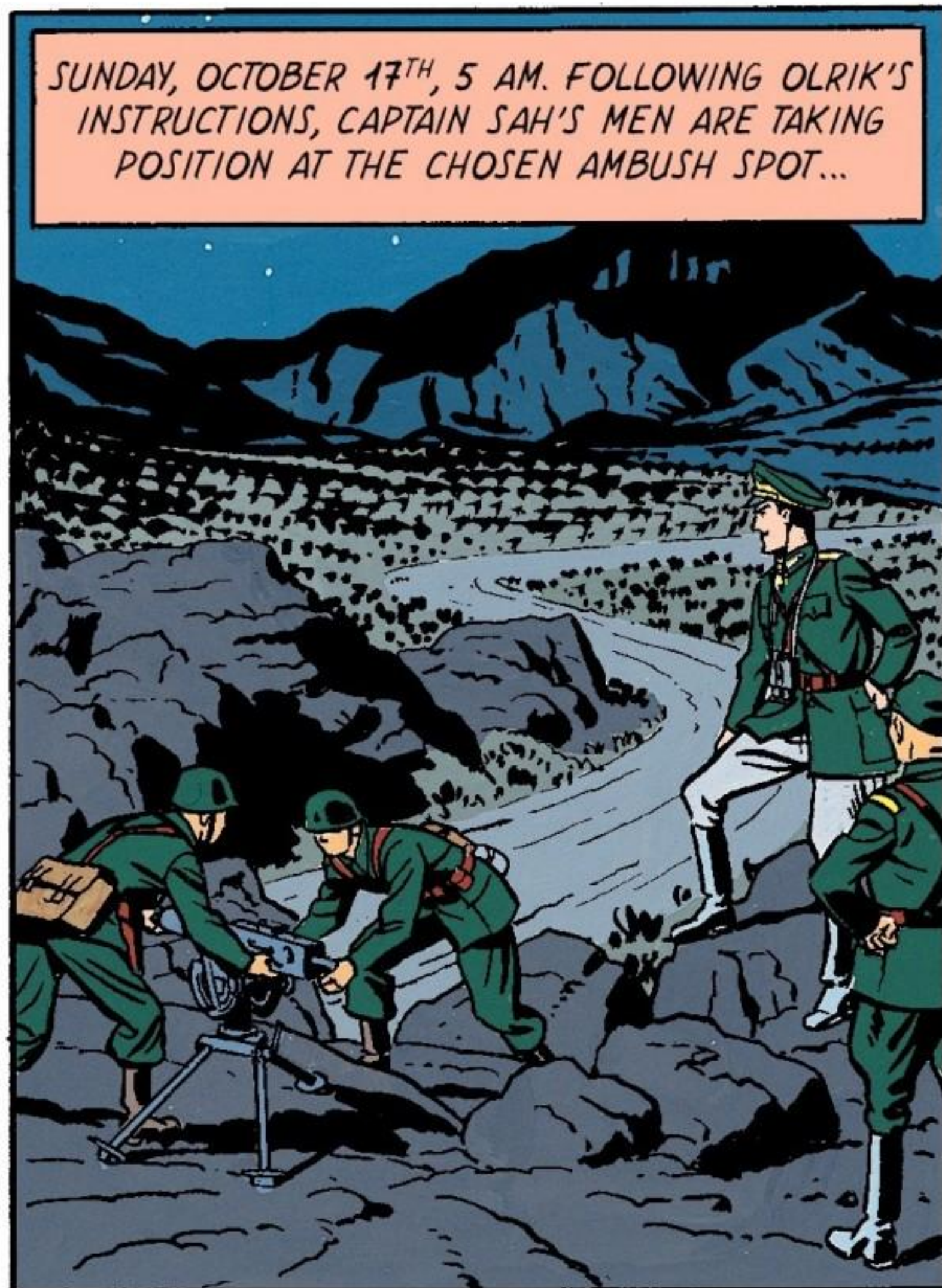
According to my calculations, the convoy will reach our position around 6 am. Our attack must be lightning fast and I want no survivors. Is that clear?

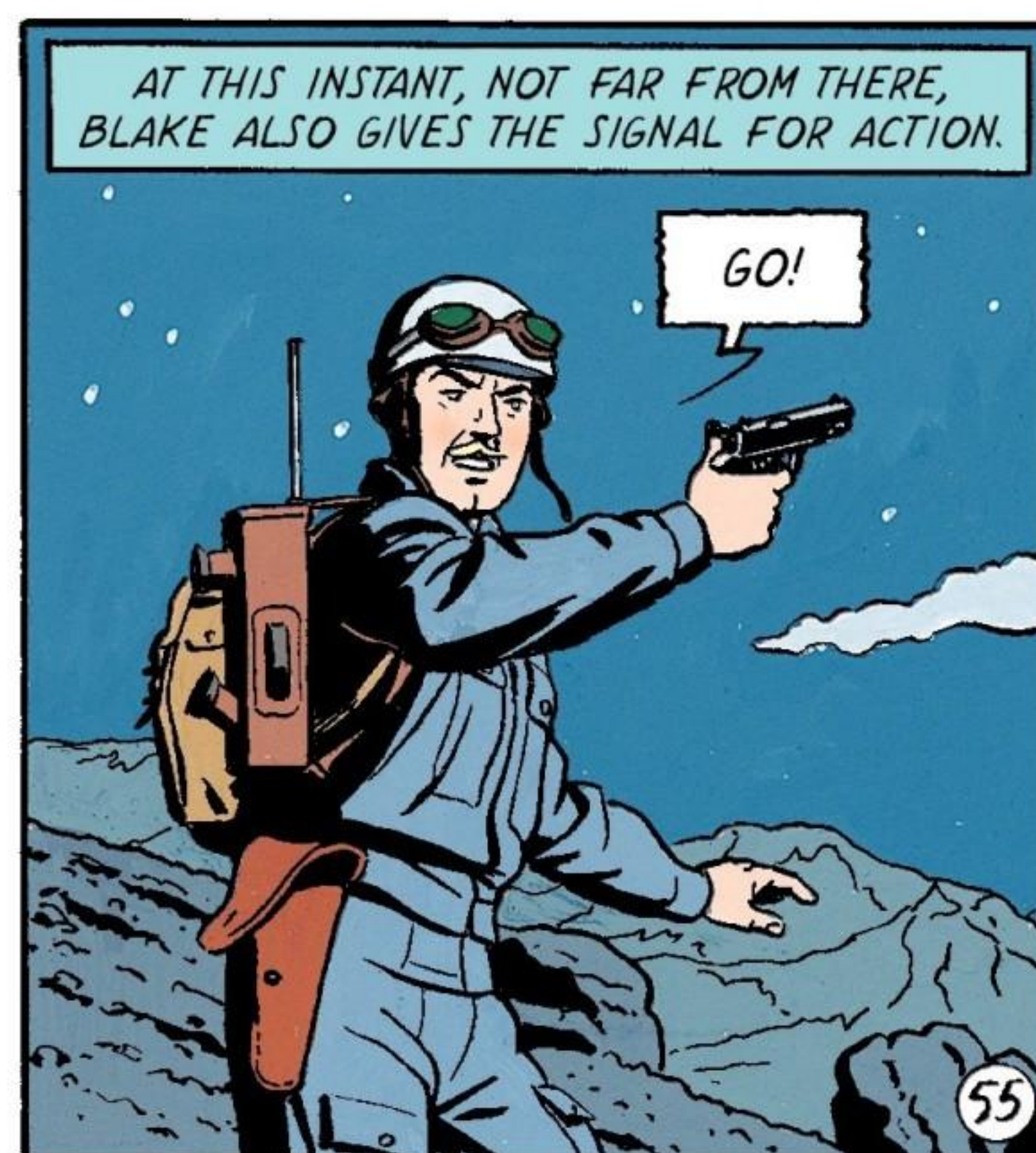
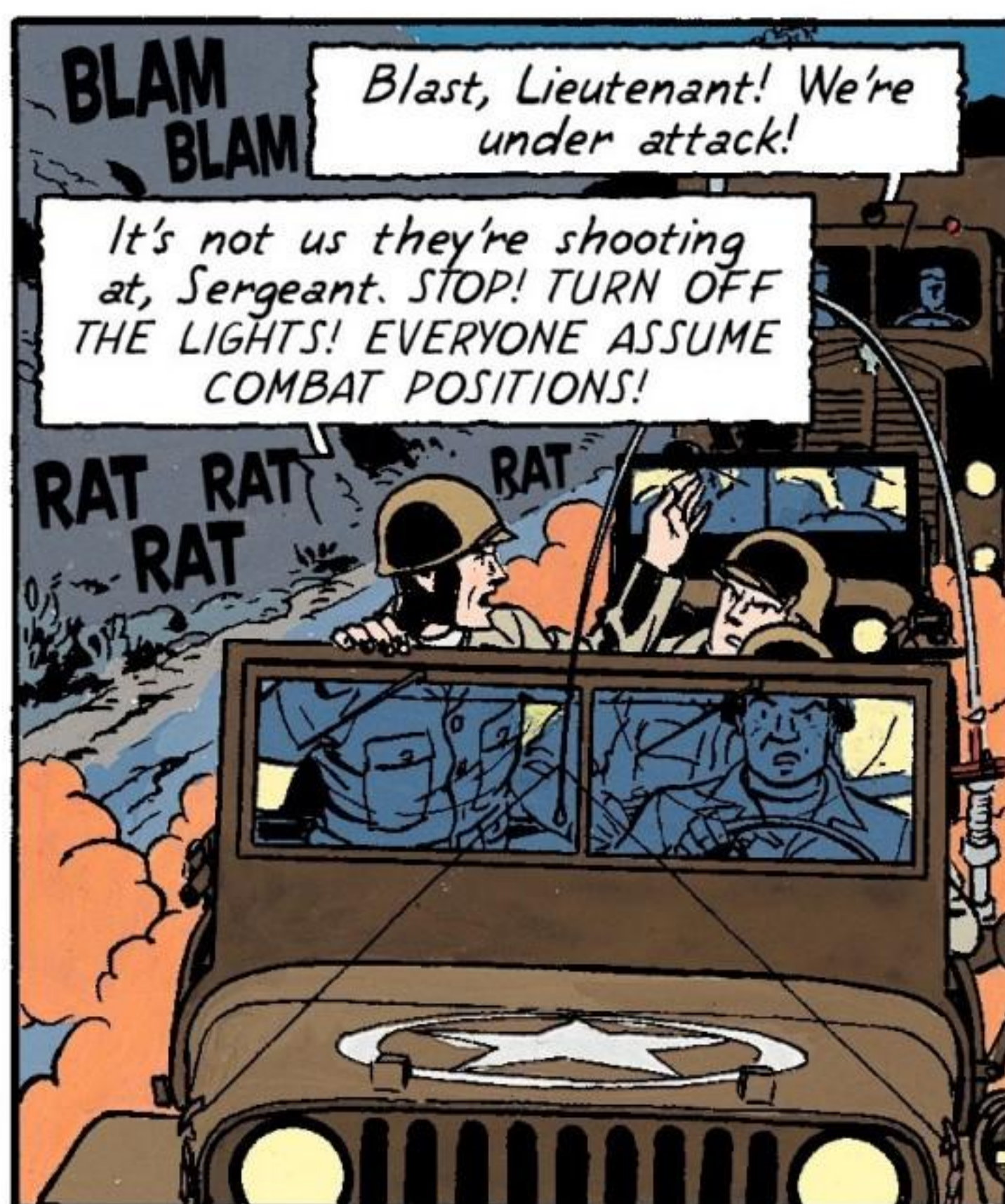
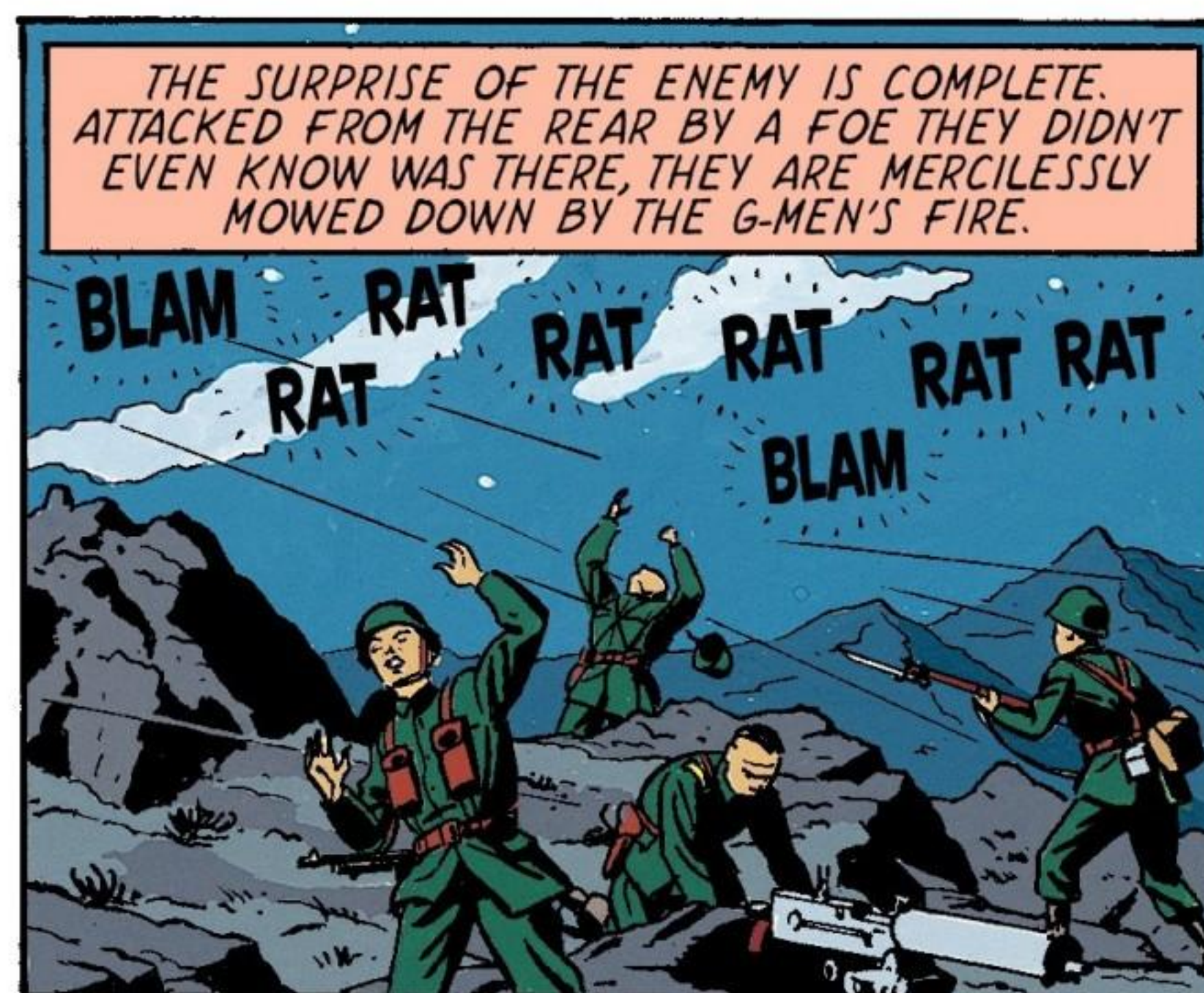
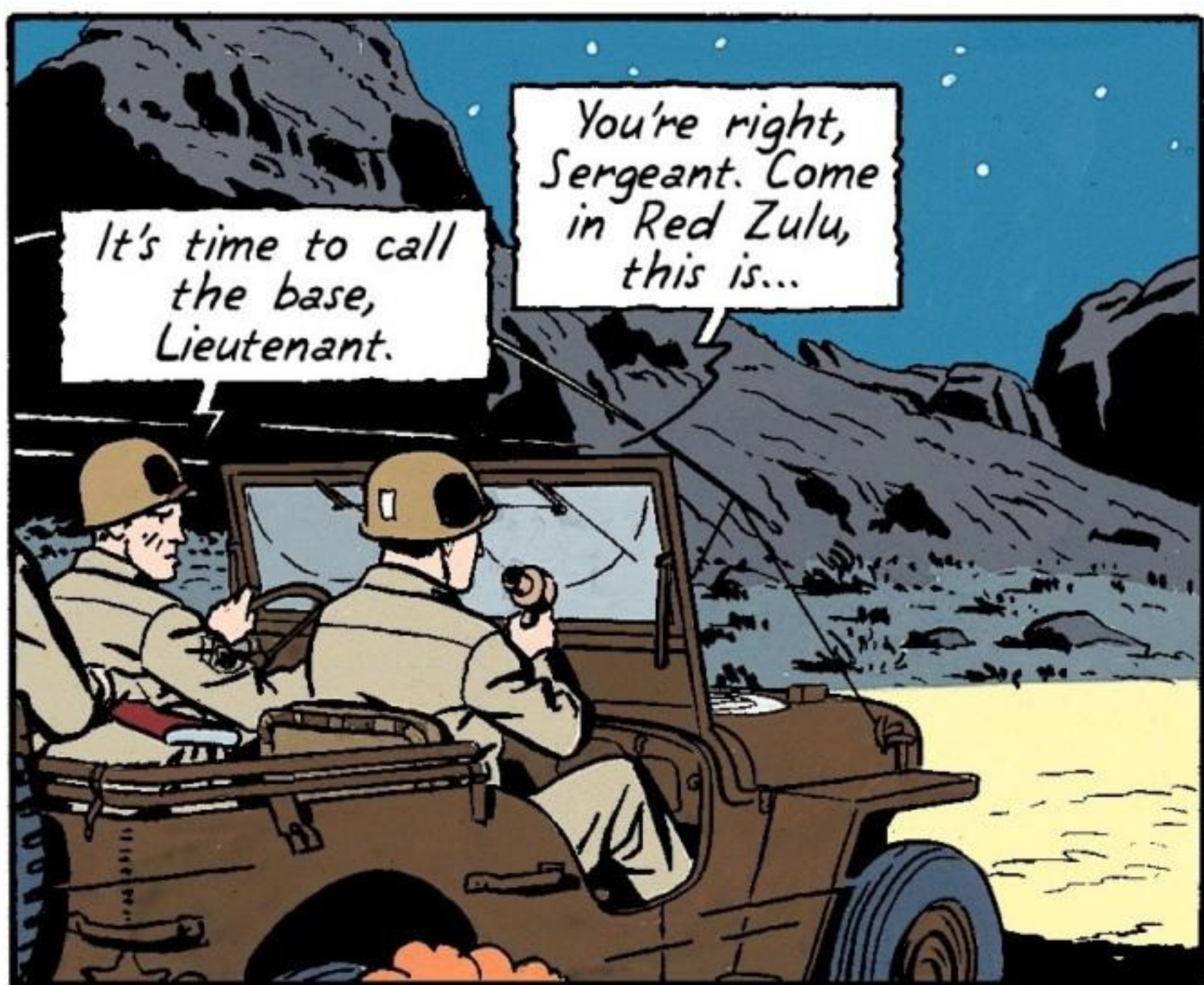
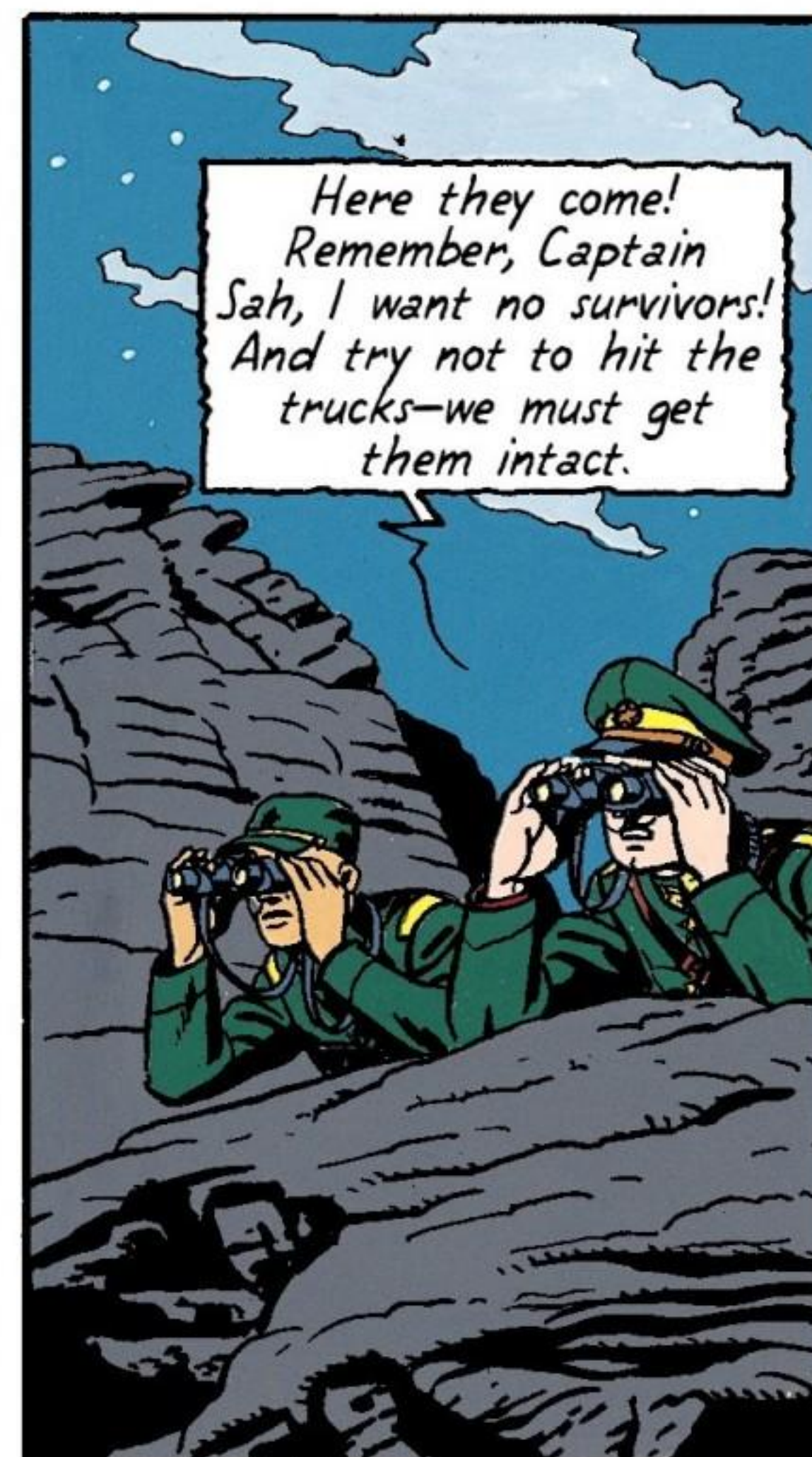
Quite clear, Colonel!

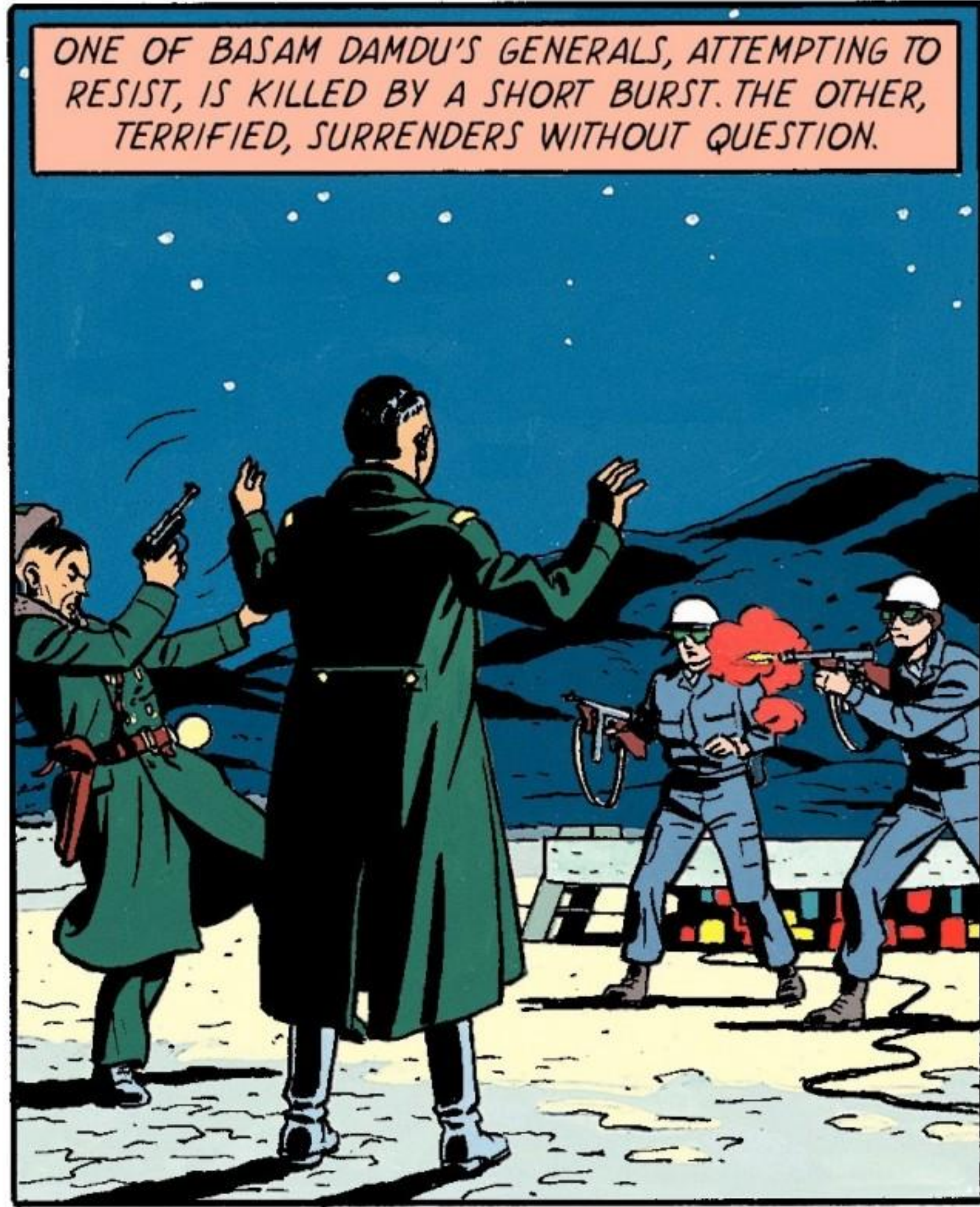
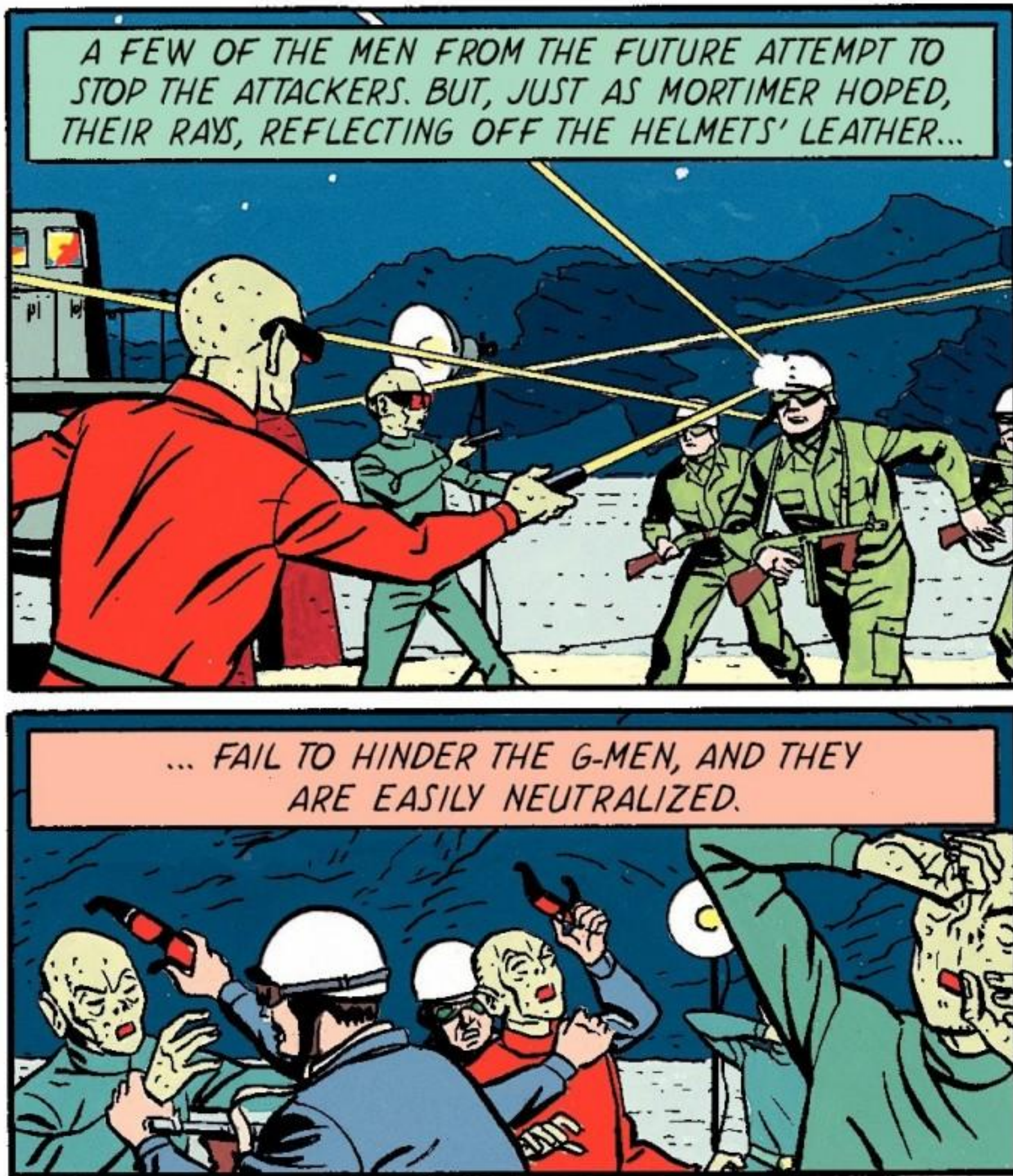
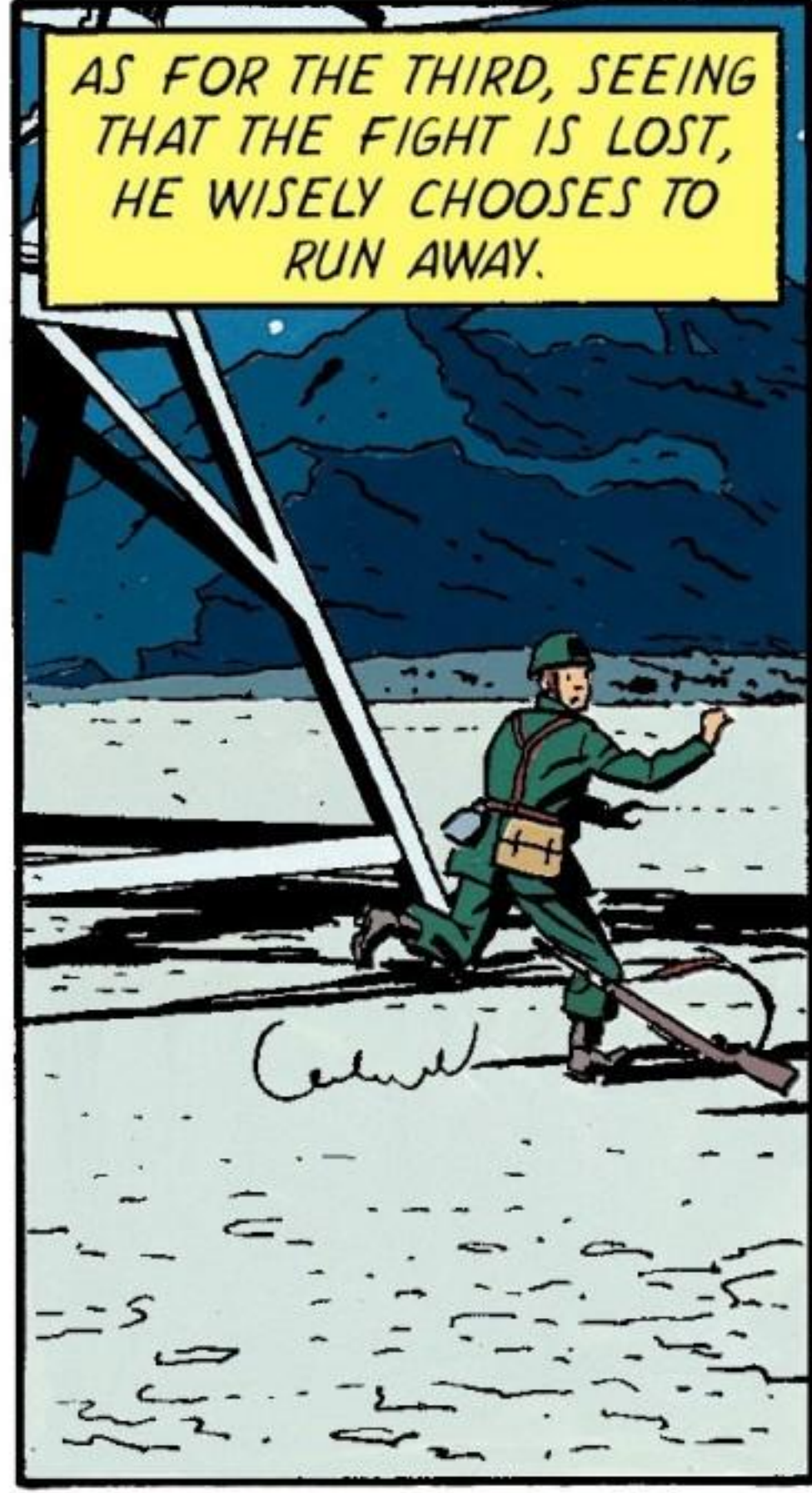


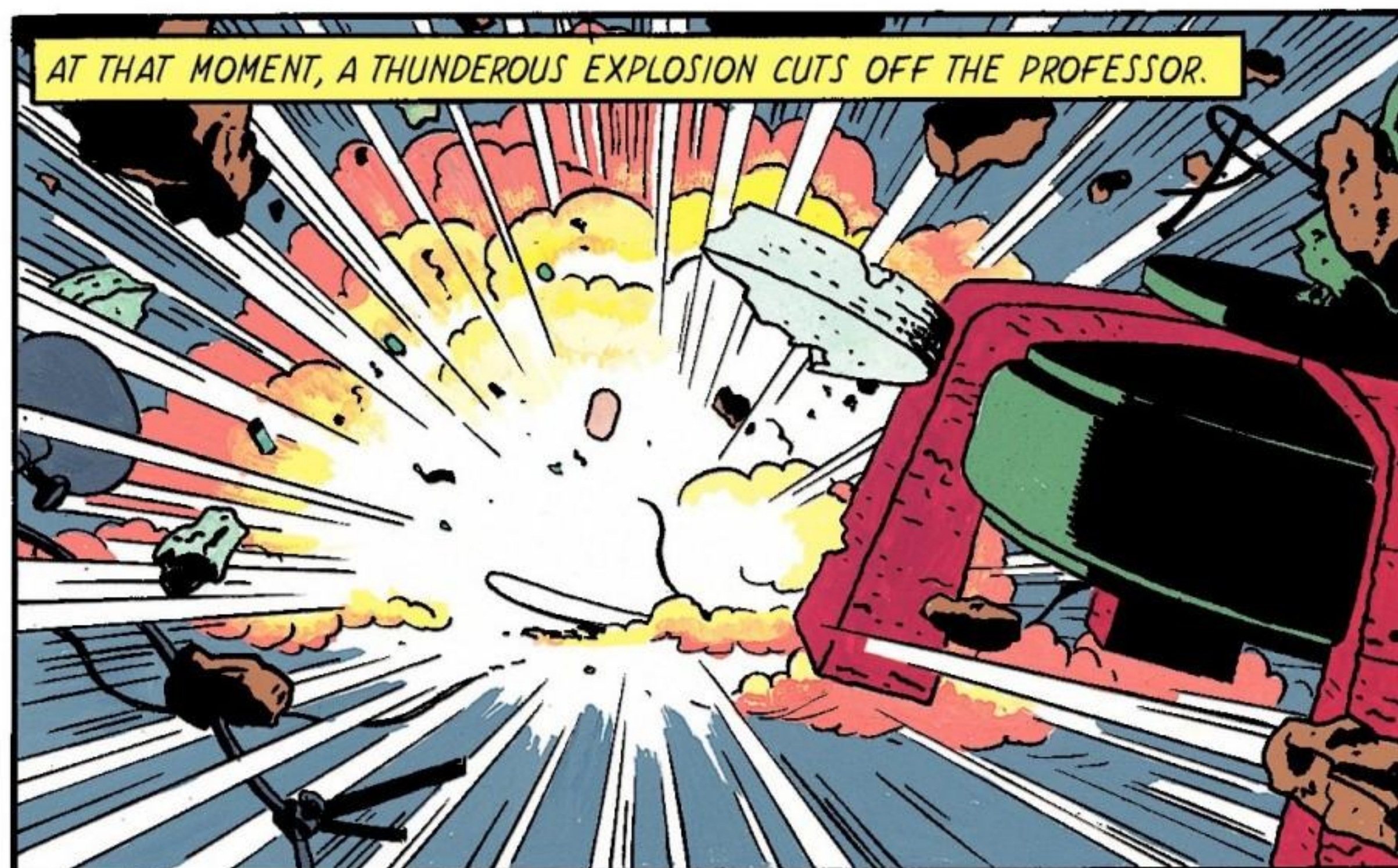
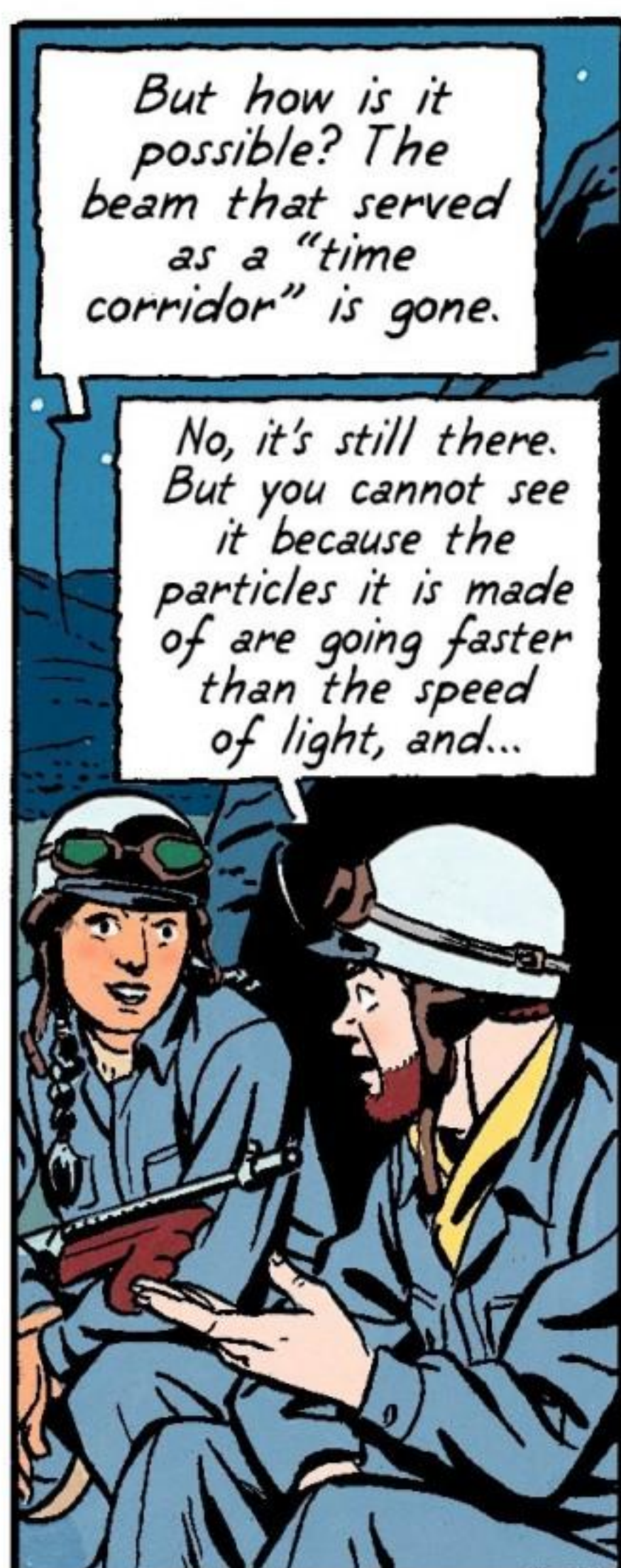
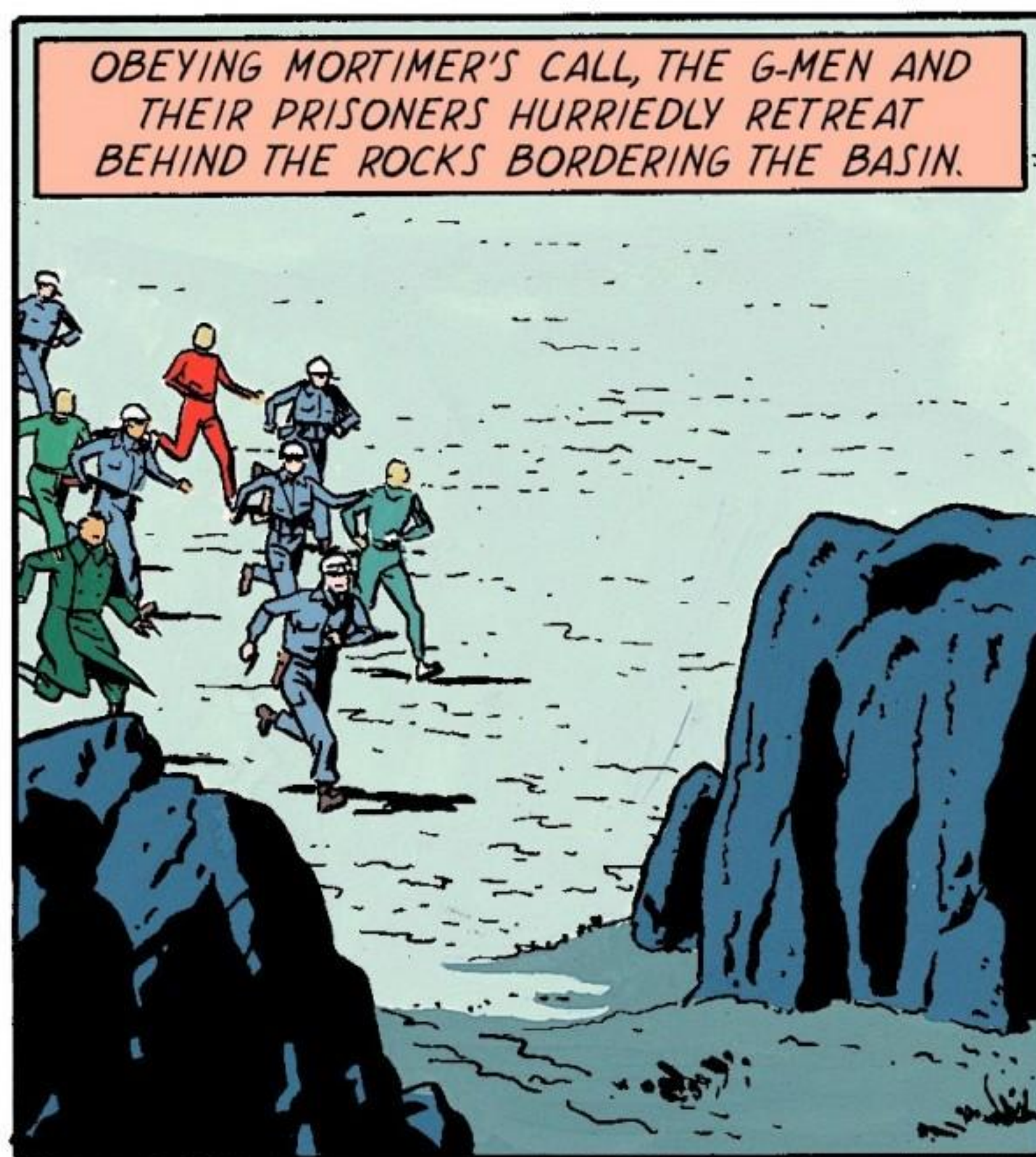
Ah, Captain, I feel alive again! This operation reminds me of the good old times.

Me, too, Colonel. I cannot wait to duke it out with these damn Yankees!!













SLIDING TOWARDS THE SECOND TRUCK OF THE CONVOY, WHOSE DRIVERS HAVE CARELESSLY WALKED SOME DISTANCE AWAY, HE TRIES TO SLIP DISCREETLY INSIDE THE CABIN.



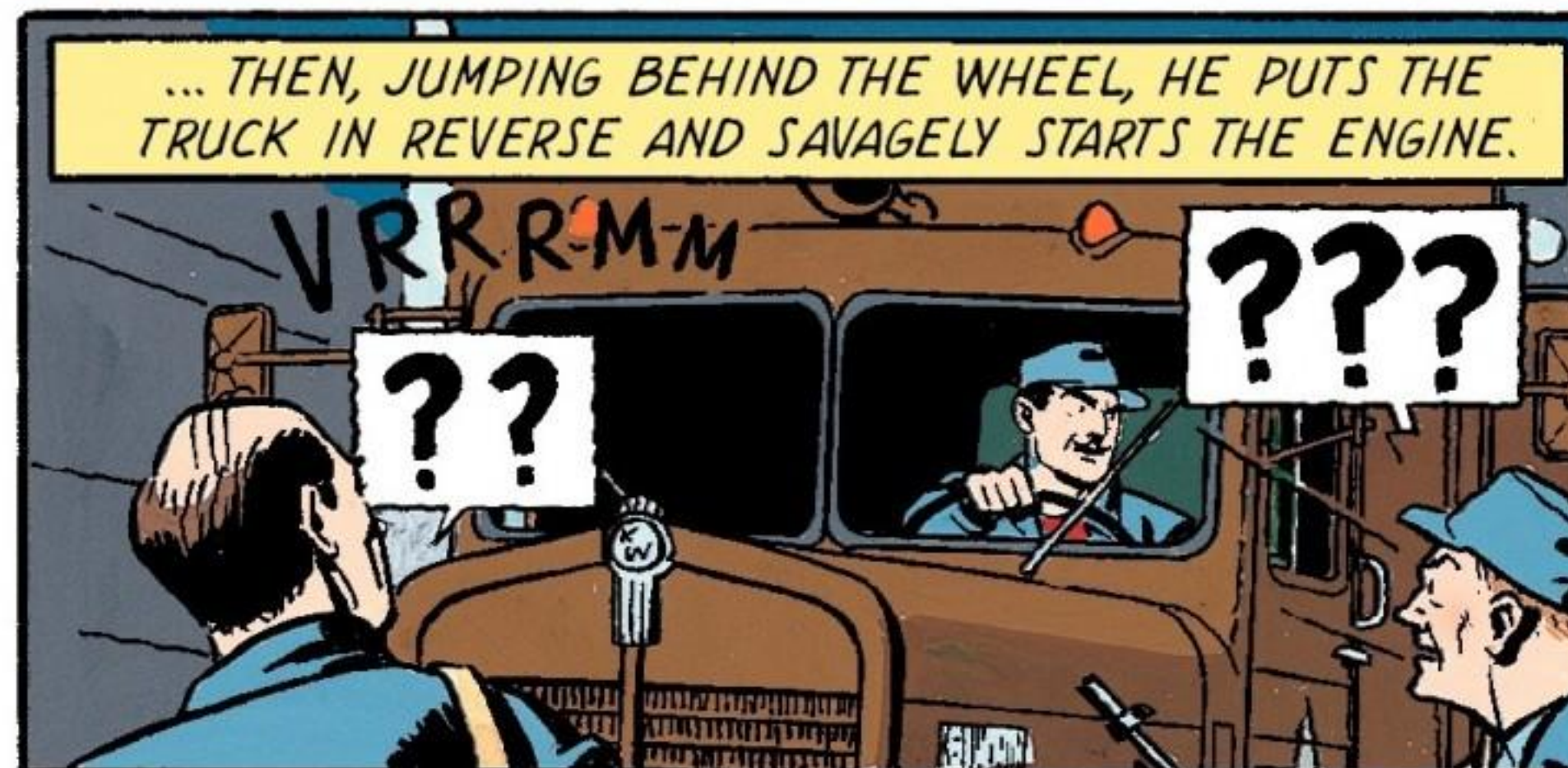
BUT ONE OF THE SOLDIERS SEES HIM.

Hey, G-man, what are you doing there!? Get off that truck!

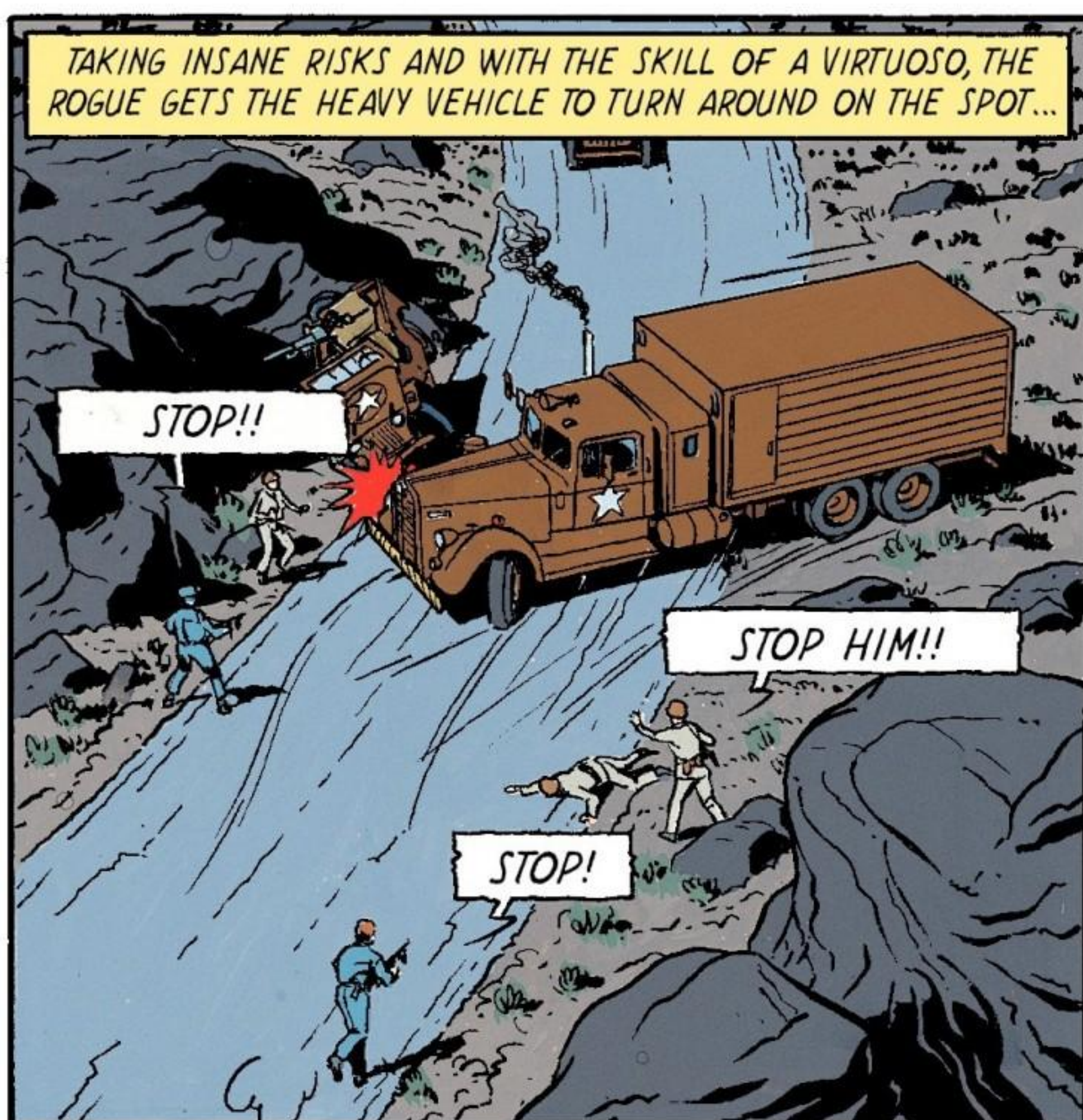


OLRIK'S ONLY ANSWER IS TO GUN DOWN THE UNFORTUNATE...

AAAAHHH!



... THEN, JUMPING BEHIND THE WHEEL, HE PUTS THE TRUCK IN REVERSE AND SAVAGELY STARTS THE ENGINE.



TAKING INSANE RISKS AND WITH THE SKILL OF A VIRTUOSO, THE ROGUE GETS THE HEAVY VEHICLE TO TURN AROUND ON THE SPOT...

STOP!!

STOP HIM!!

STOP!



... THEN GUNS THE ENGINE AND FLIES OFF ALONG THE ROAD, NOW EMPTY BEFORE HIM.

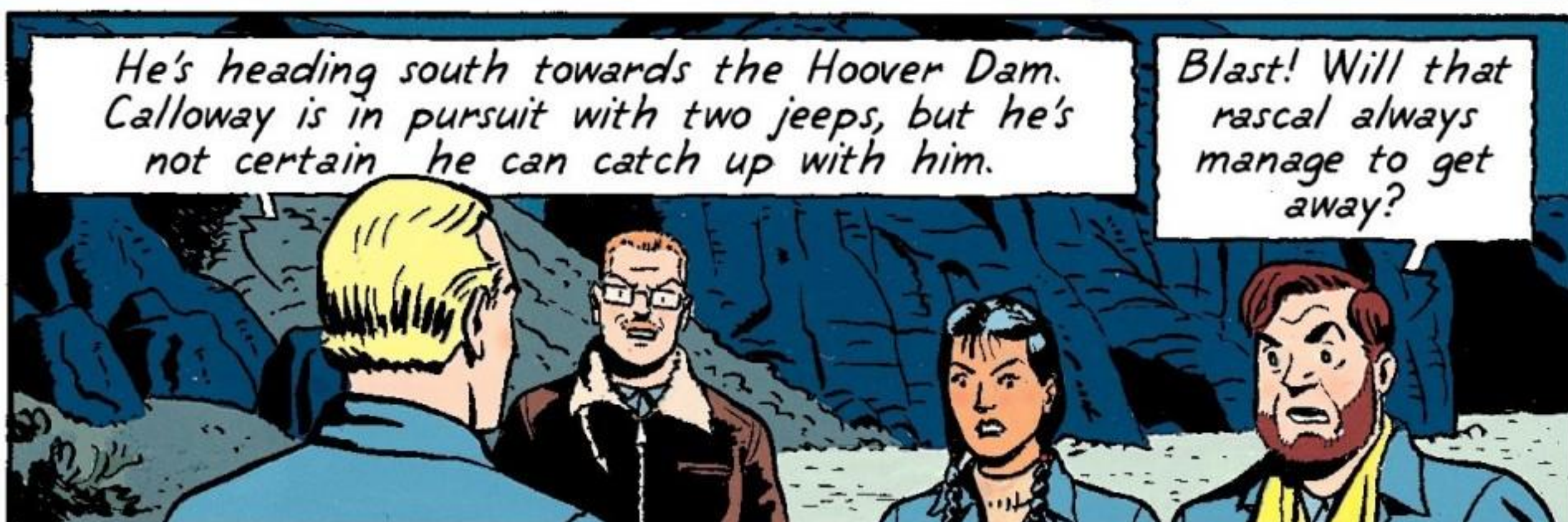
Dirty dog!
NO, HOLD
YOUR FIRE!!



That truck's carrying H bombs, for heaven's sake, not bags of rice!... Blake, come in!... Blake!...



Bad news, my friends. That devil Olrik managed to steal one of the convoy's trucks.



He's heading south towards the Hoover Dam. Calloway is in pursuit with two jeeps, but he's not certain he can catch up with him.

Blast! Will that rascal always manage to get away?



I know this area well. By cutting across the desert, we could make it to the dam before him.

With what? Our vehicles are five miles from here, and the enemy's trucks are too slow.

Would this carriage be appropriate, señores?



Ramirez? Where on Earth did you find this?

Behind these gentlemen's trucks. Nice, isn't it? I've always dreamed of driving a Cadillac.



Well, you'll drive it another time. Scoot over and hold this, Doctor: I'm taking the wheel!

But...

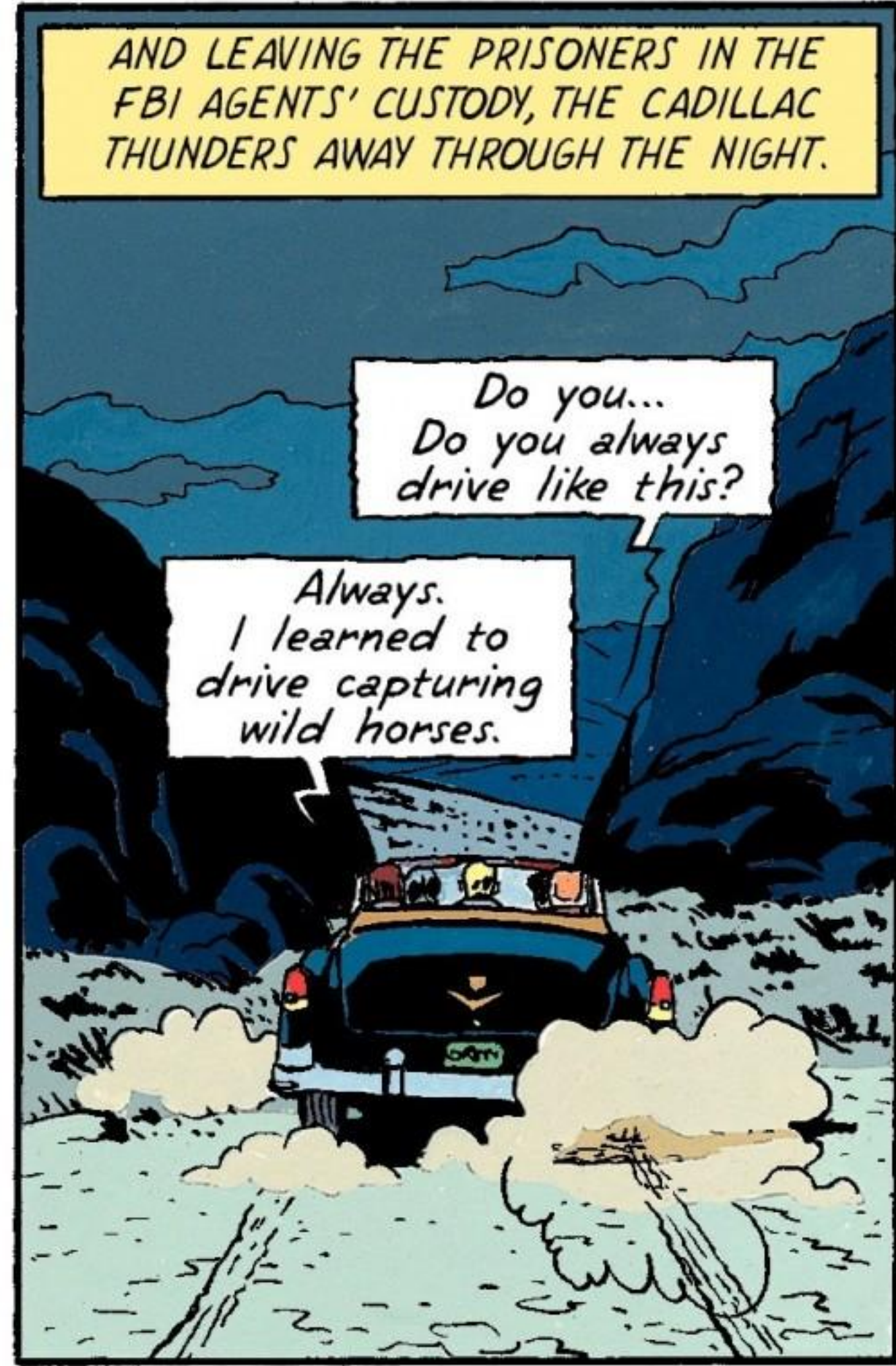


No buts! Fasten your seatbelts—here we go!



EEEEEEEEEE

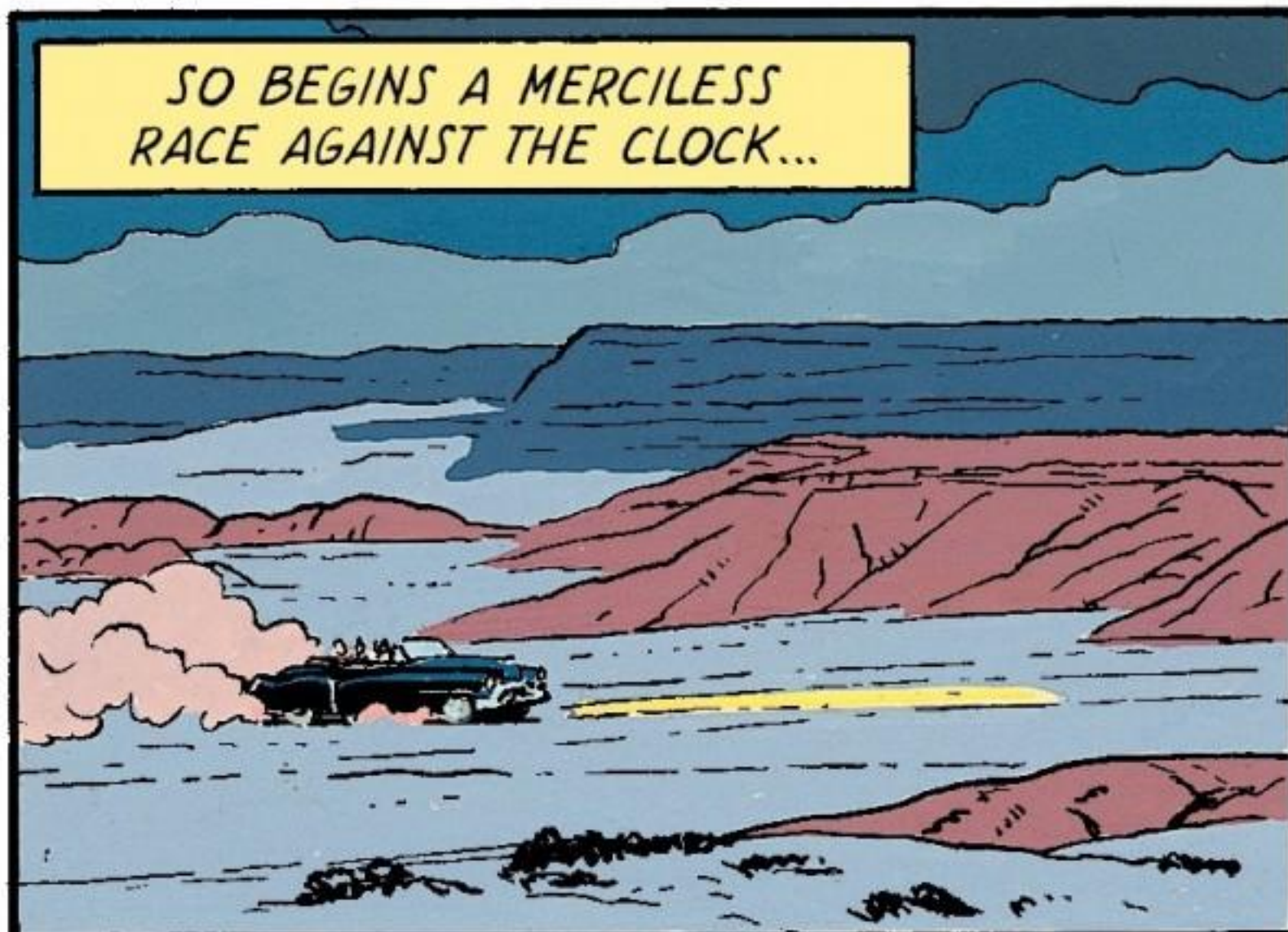
HEEEEEYYY!!



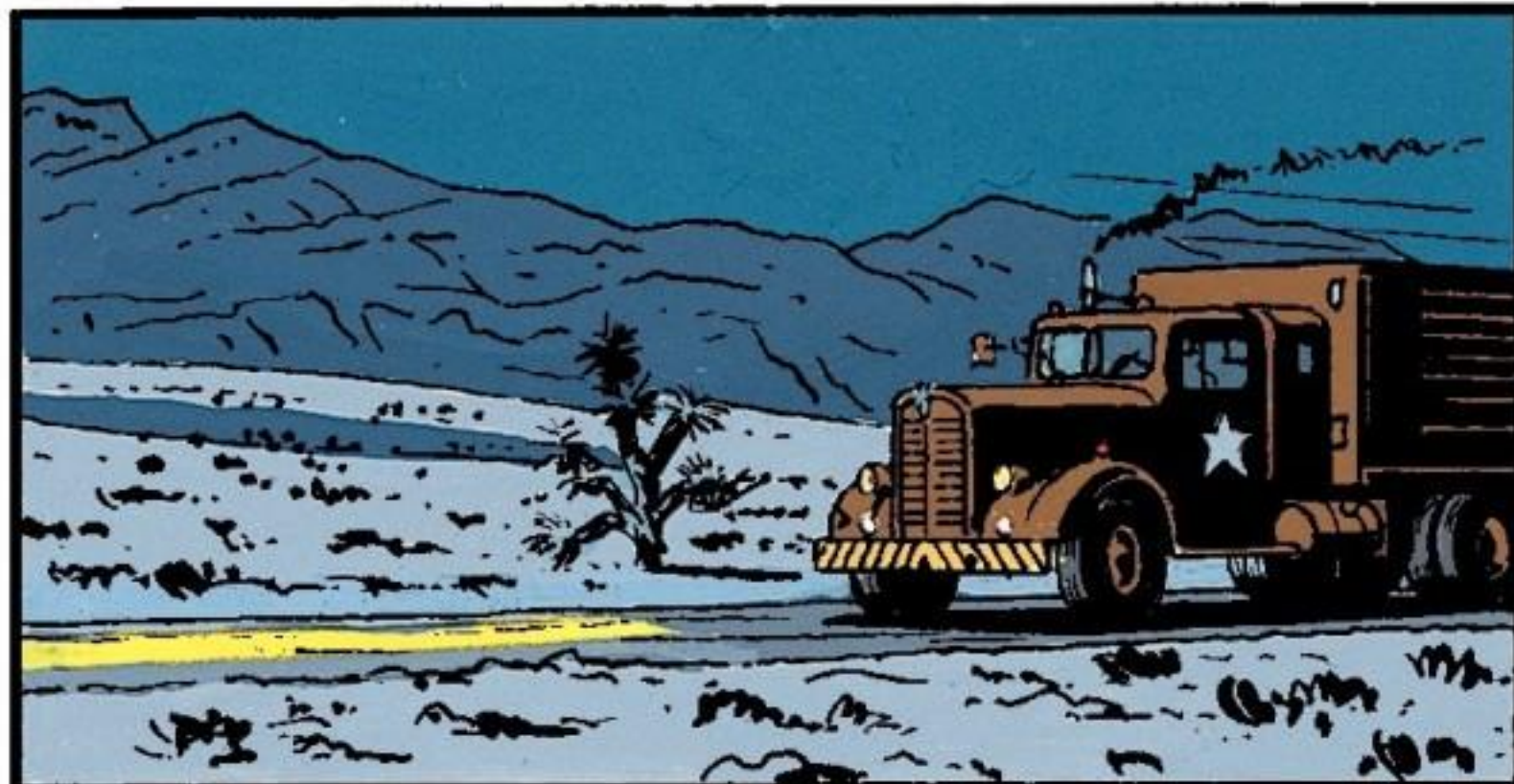
AND LEAVING THE PRISONERS IN THE FBI AGENTS' CUSTODY, THE CADILLAC THUNDERS AWAY THROUGH THE NIGHT.

Do you...
Do you always
drive like this?

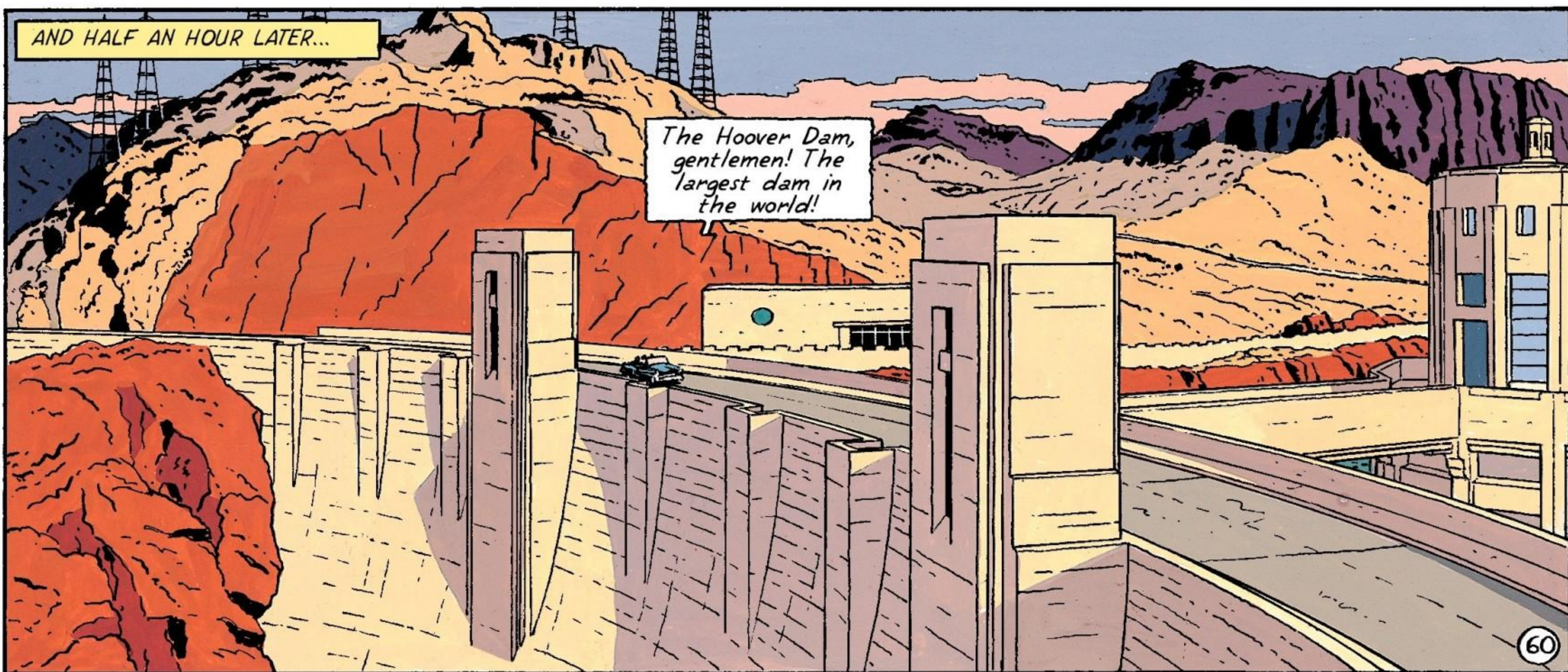
Always.
I learned to
drive capturing
wild horses.



SO BEGINS A MERCILESS
RACE AGAINST THE CLOCK...

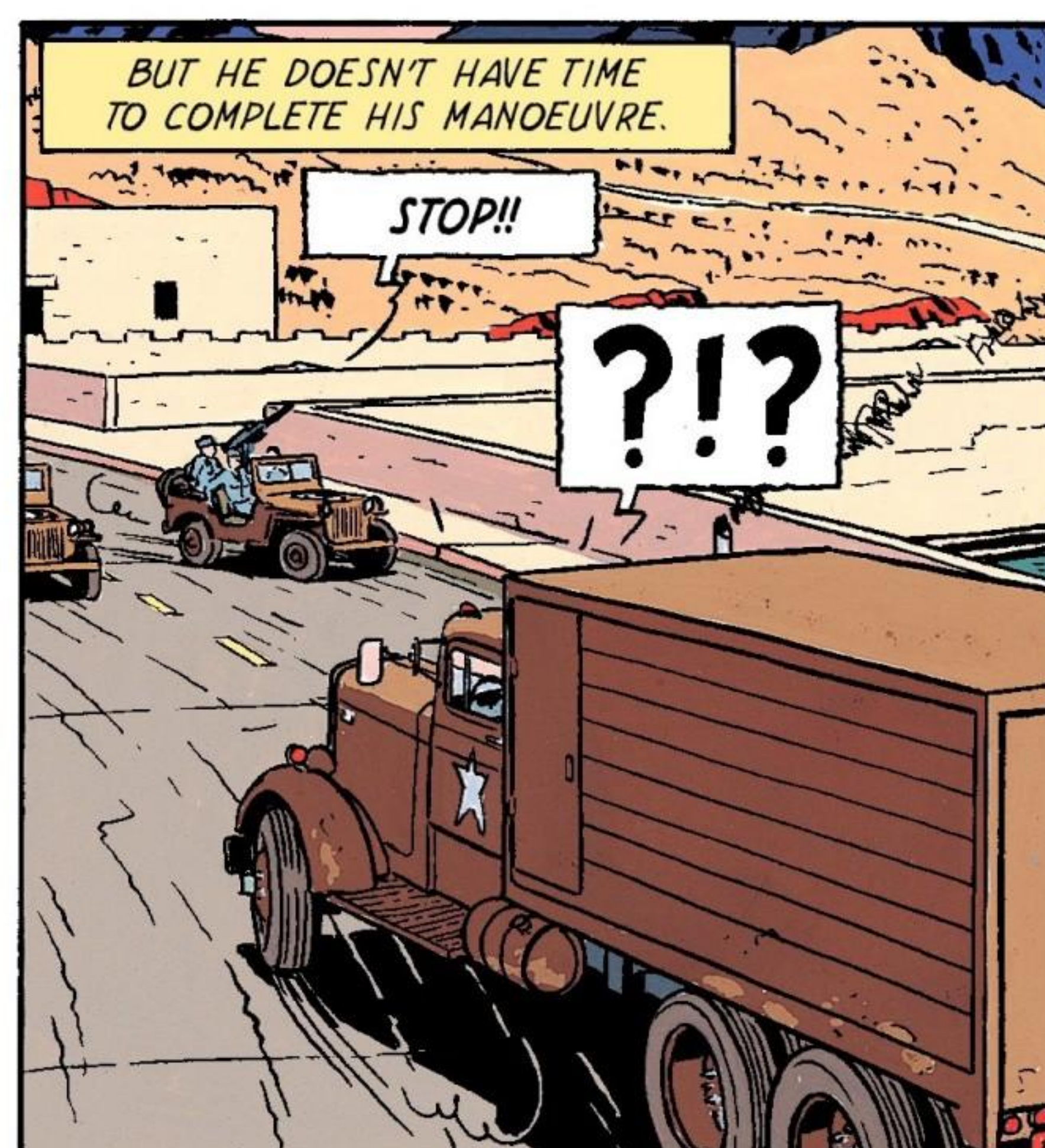
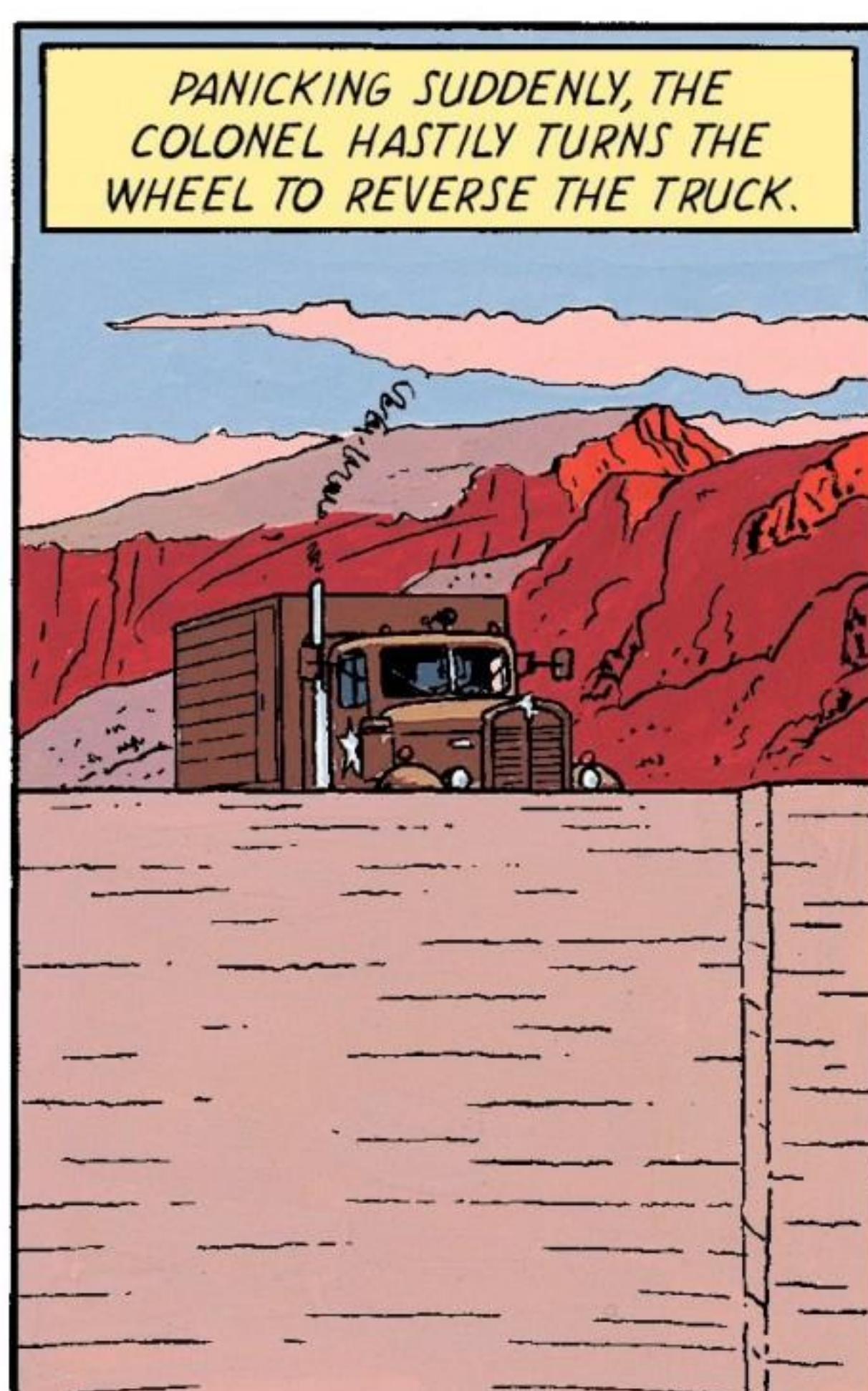
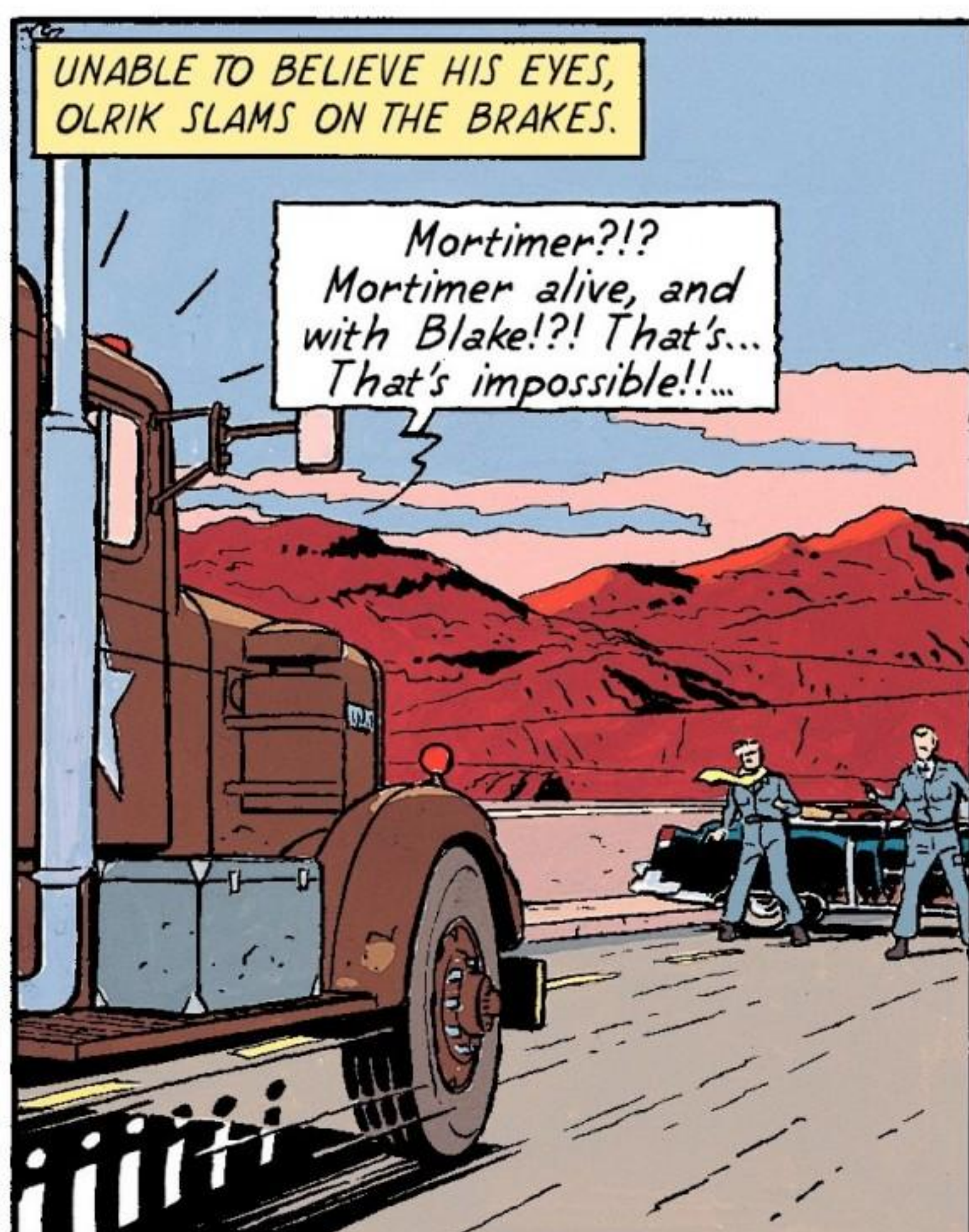
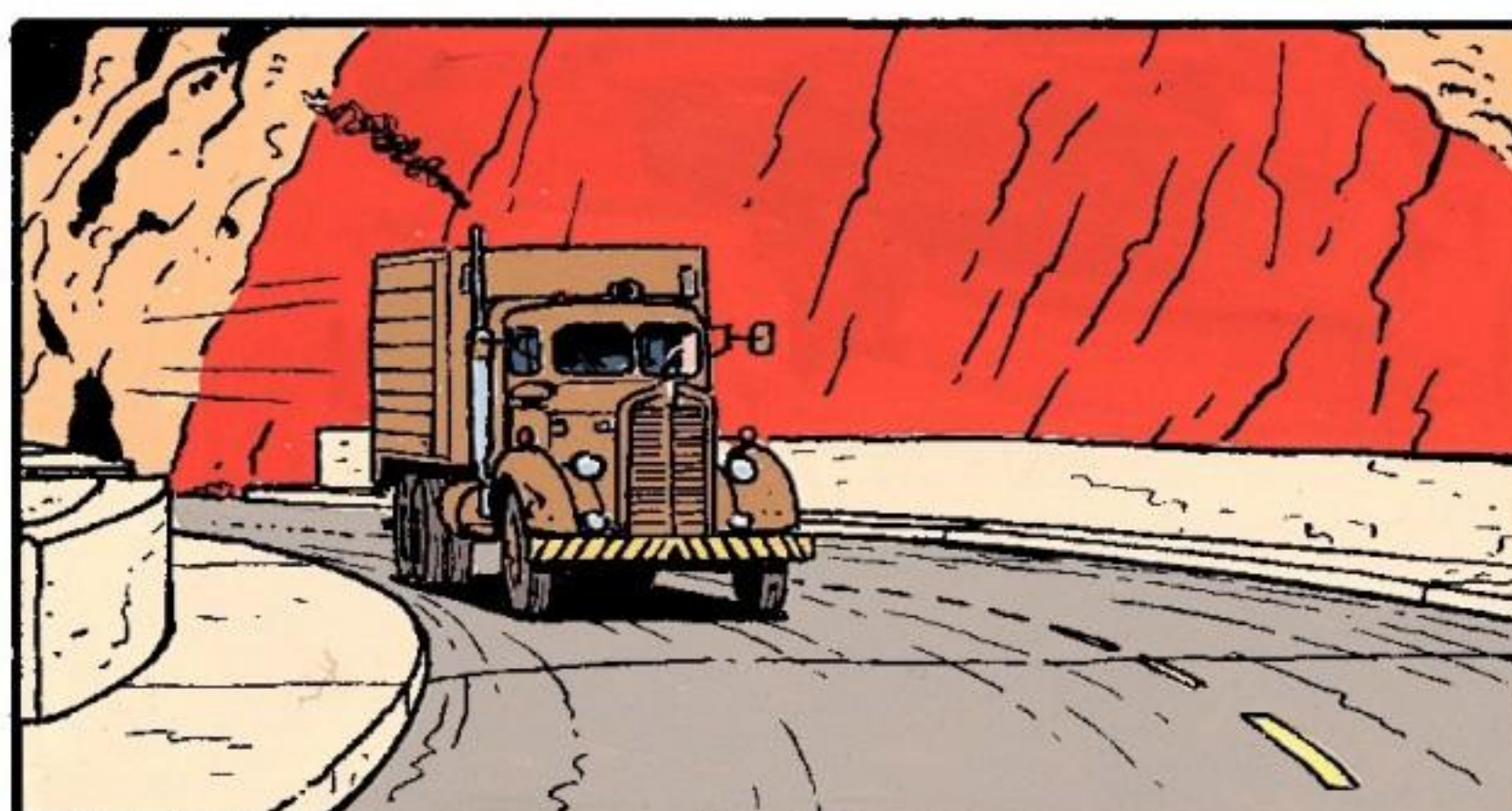
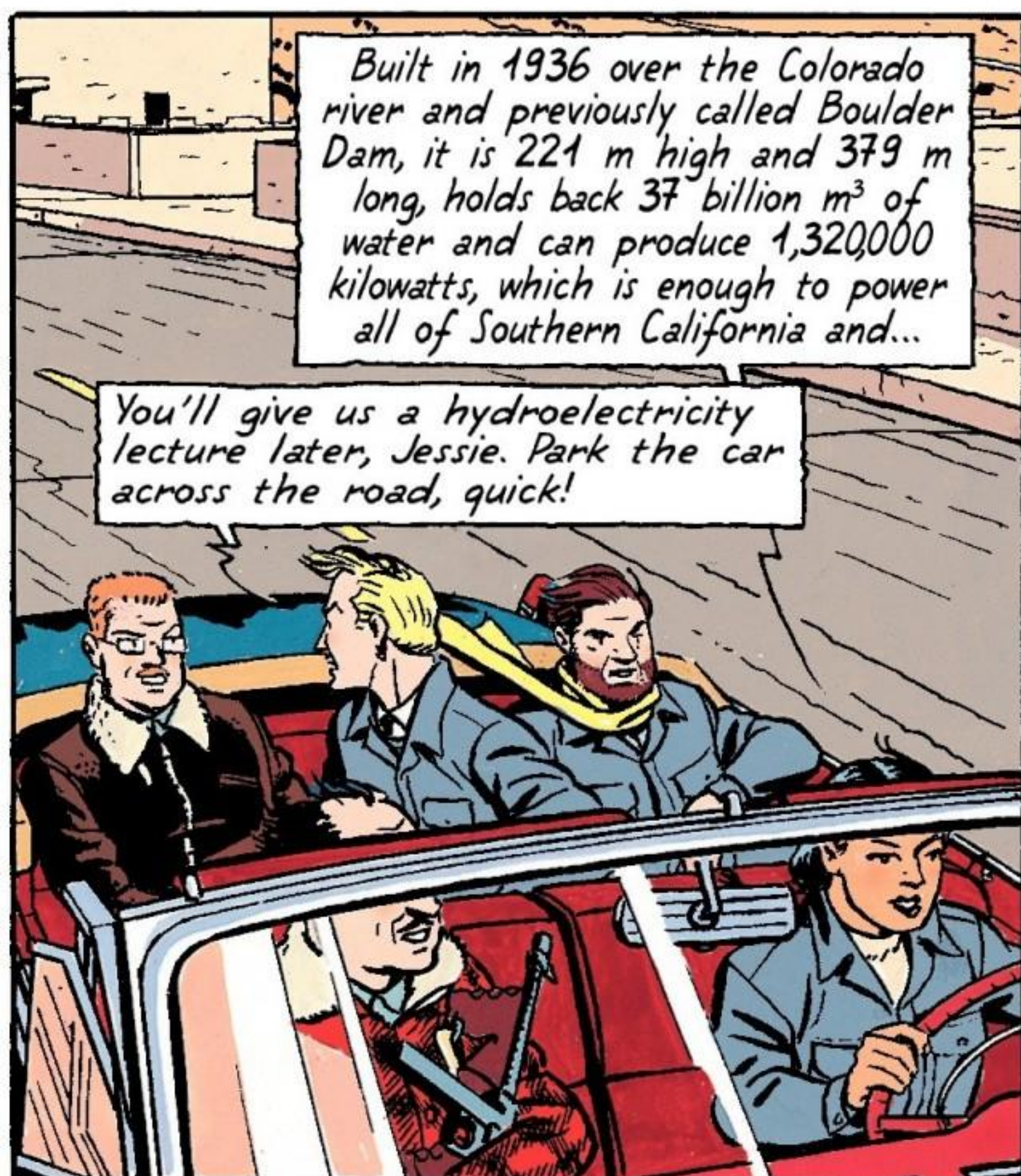


There's Lake Mead! We'll
be at the dam at dawn.



AND HALF AN HOUR LATER...

The Hoover Dam,
gentlemen! The
largest dam in
the world!



SWIFT AS A SNAKE, OLRİK HAS LEAPT OUT OF THE TRUCK AND IS NOW FEVERISHLY BUSY WITH THE ELECTRONIC CONTROLS OF A SMALL BOX, LOCATED BEHIND TWO HATCHES THAT OPEN ON THE NOSE OF THE THICK CYLINDER.

If I have to go, then I won't go alone! Ha! Ha! Ha! We'll all go together, my friends!

But... What is he doing?

By all the saints in heaven... HE'S ARMING THE BOMB!!!

A 15-megaton nuclear bomb!... On this dam!... He's gone insane!!

Dios mio!

ENRAGED AND UNABLE TO STOP HERSELF, JESSIE RUSHES TOWARDS OLRİK.

STOP THAT, YOU MADMAN! STOP IT RIGHT NOW!!

JESSIE, NO!...

WITHOUT HESITATION, THE ROGUE FIRES A SHORT BURST. HIT IN THE CHEST, THE YOUNG WOMAN CRUMPLES TO THE GROUND.

T T T T T T T T T T T T T T T T

JESSIE!!!

THREE MINUTES, GENTLEMEN! IN EXACTLY THREE MINUTES YOU WILL BE PRIVILEGED TO WITNESS THE GREATEST EXPLOSION OF THE CENTURY. HA! HA! HA!

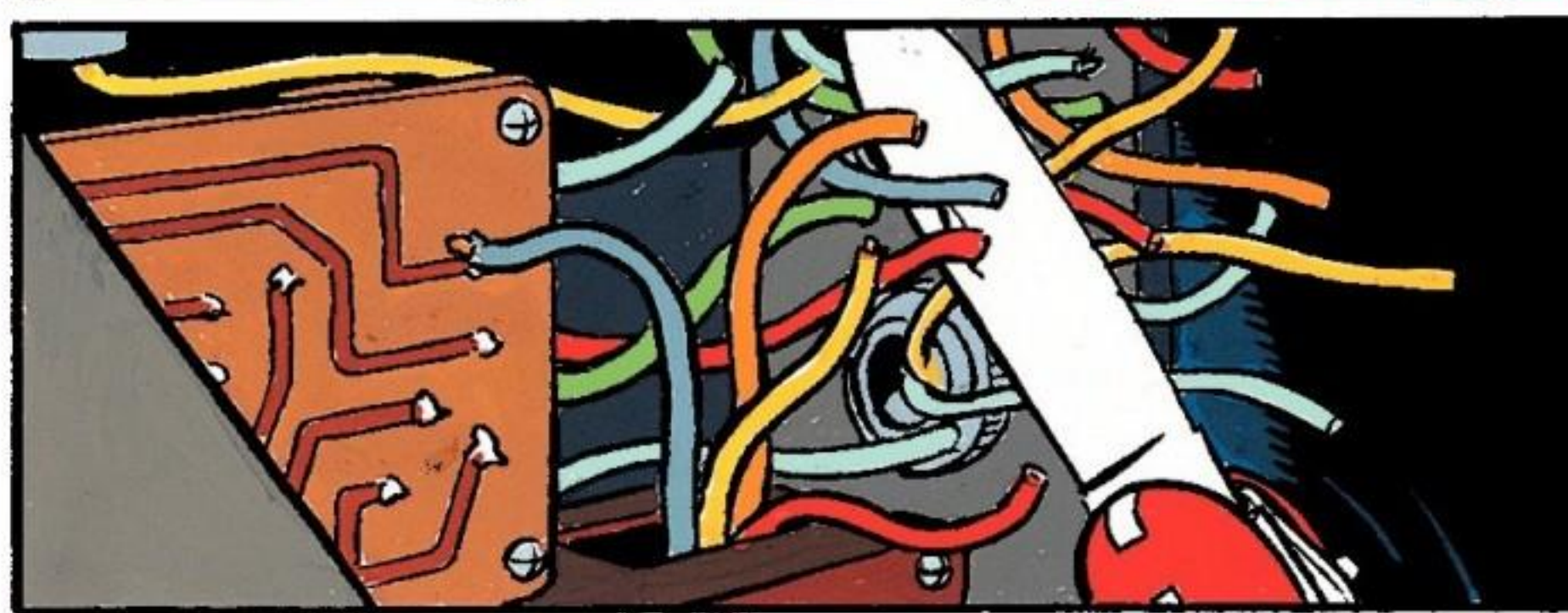
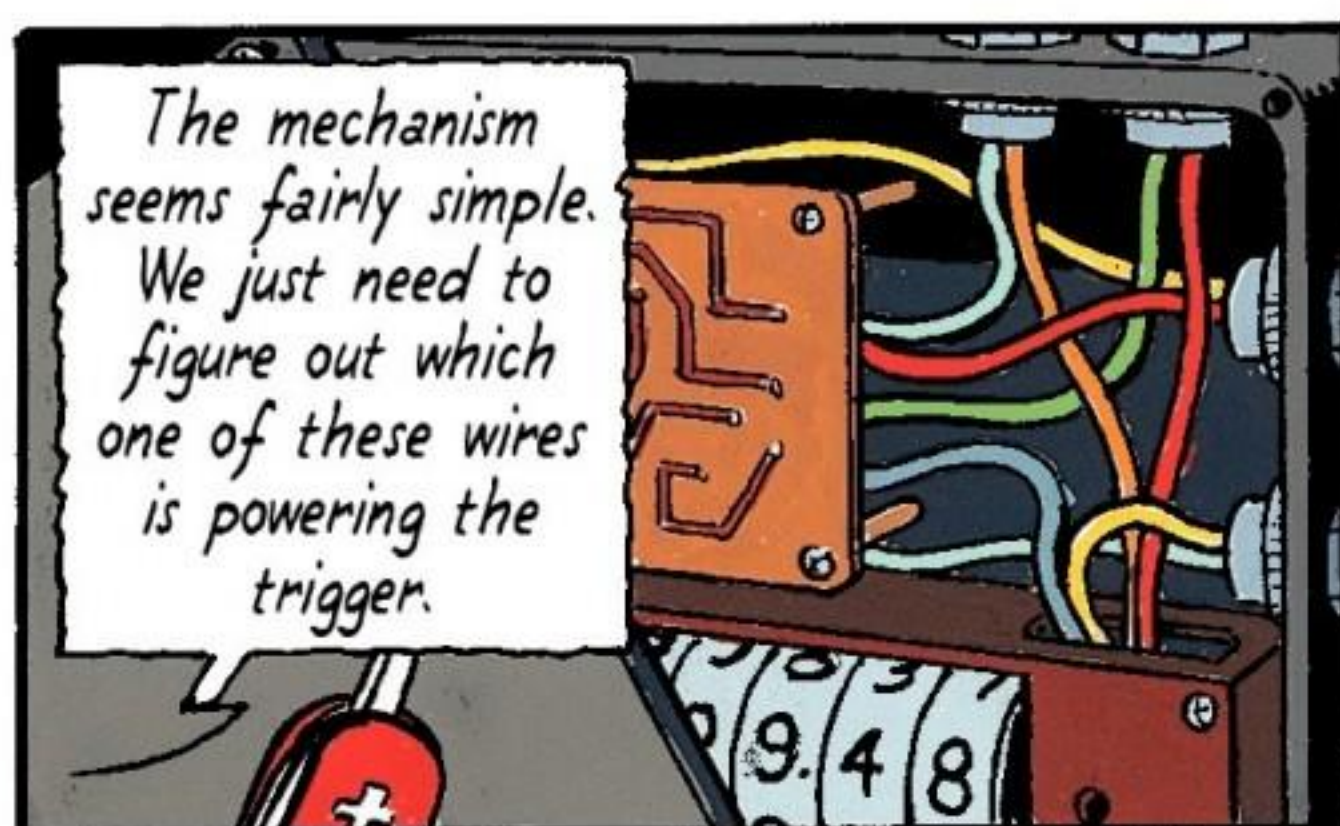
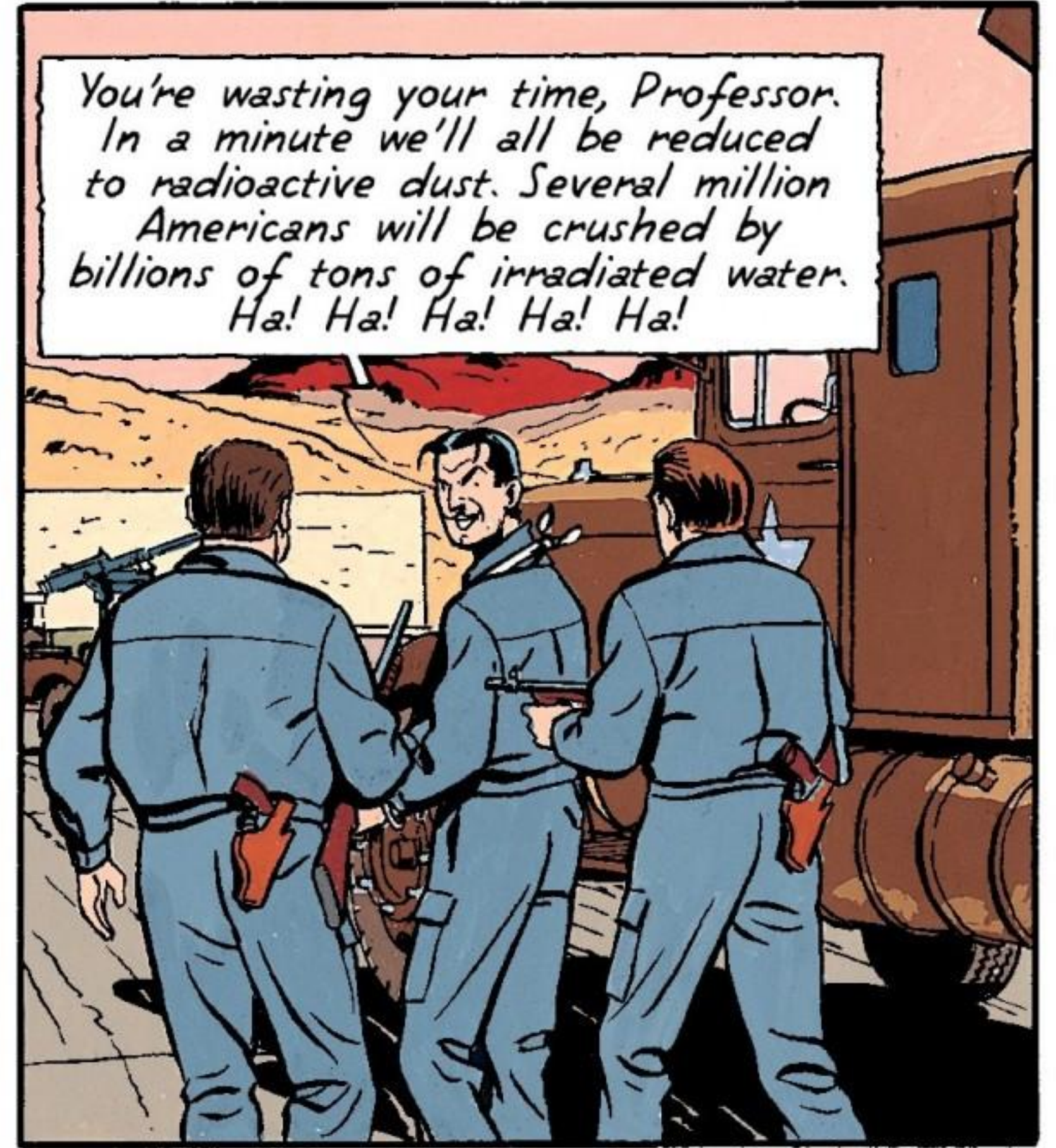
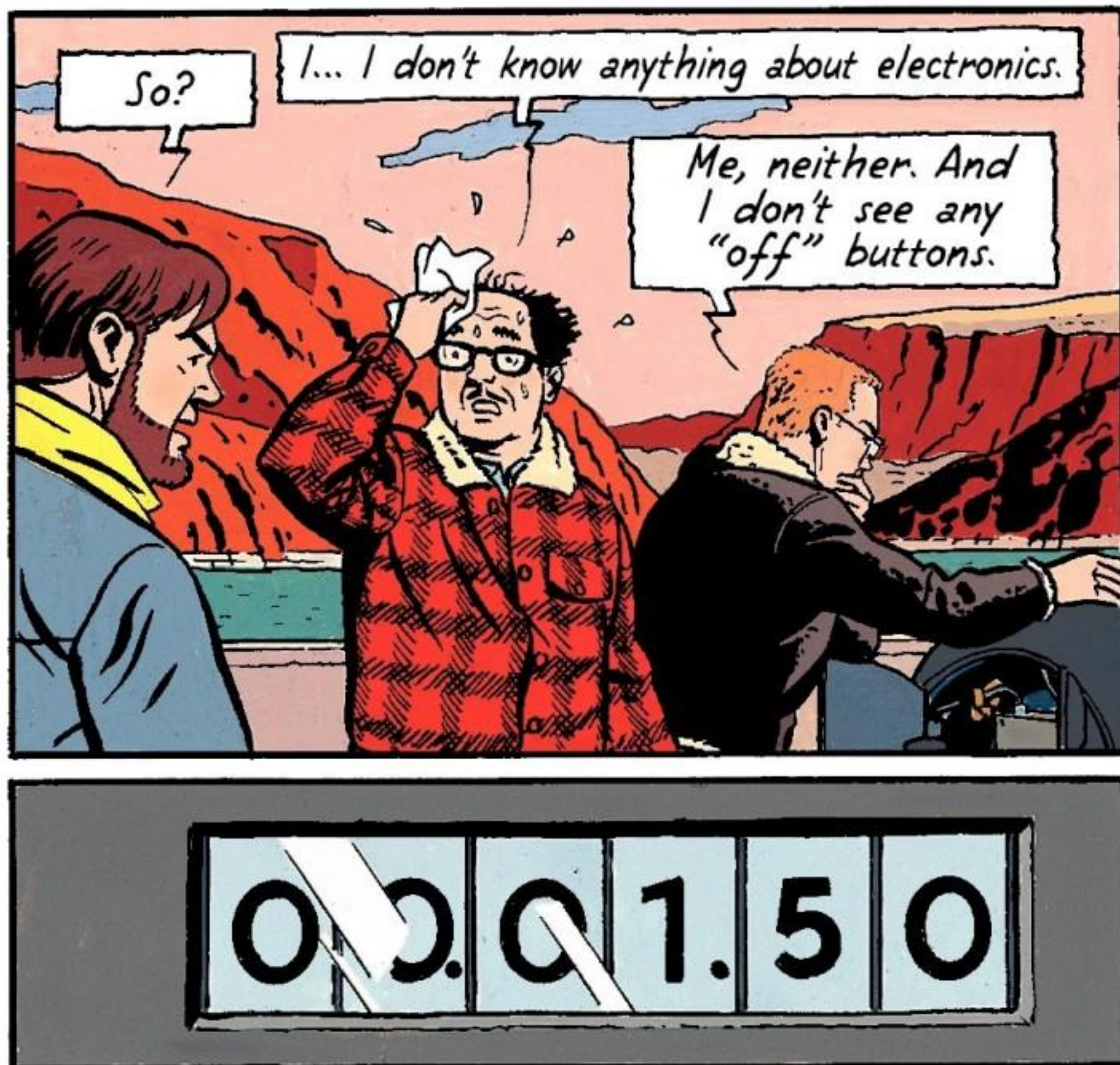
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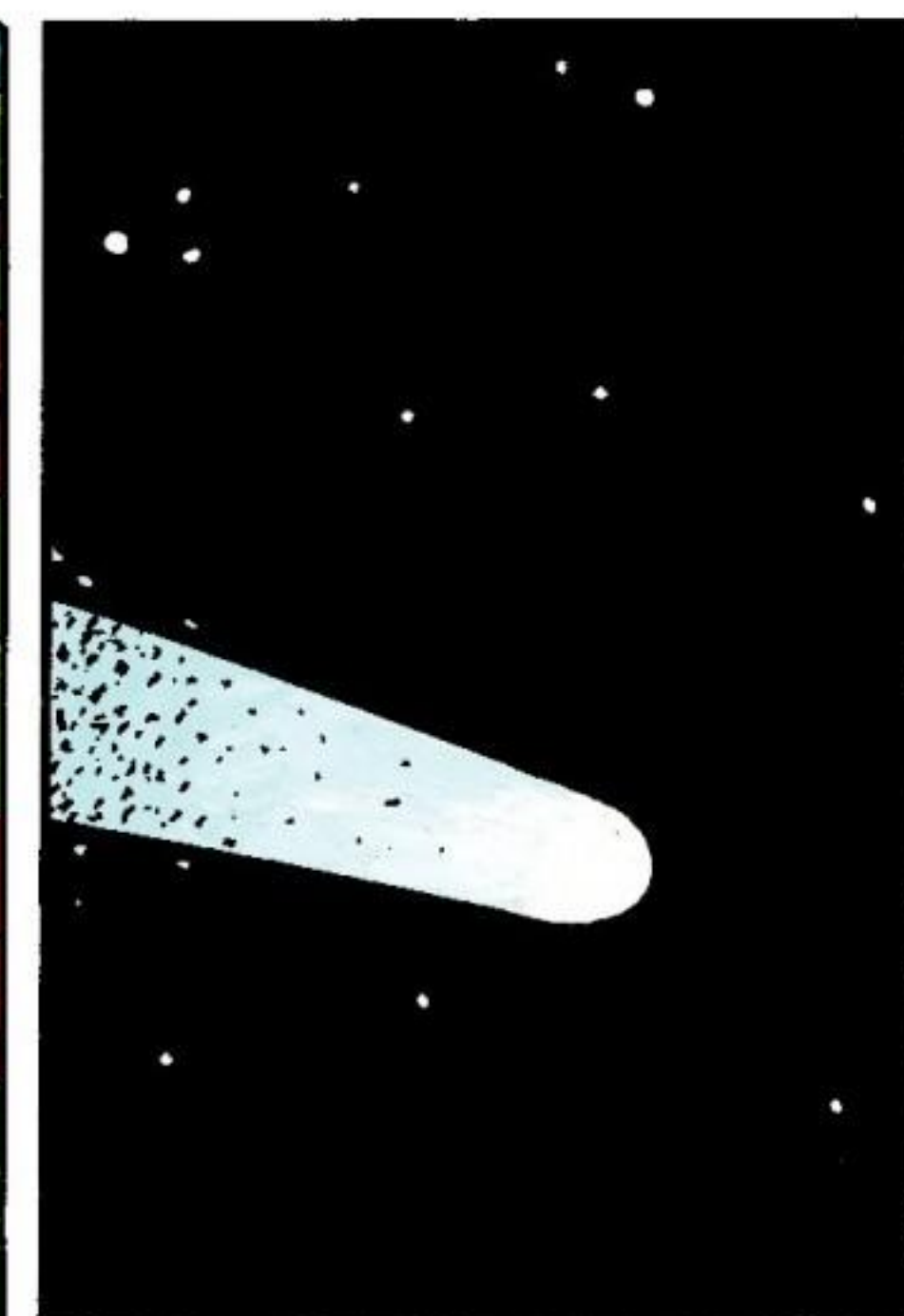
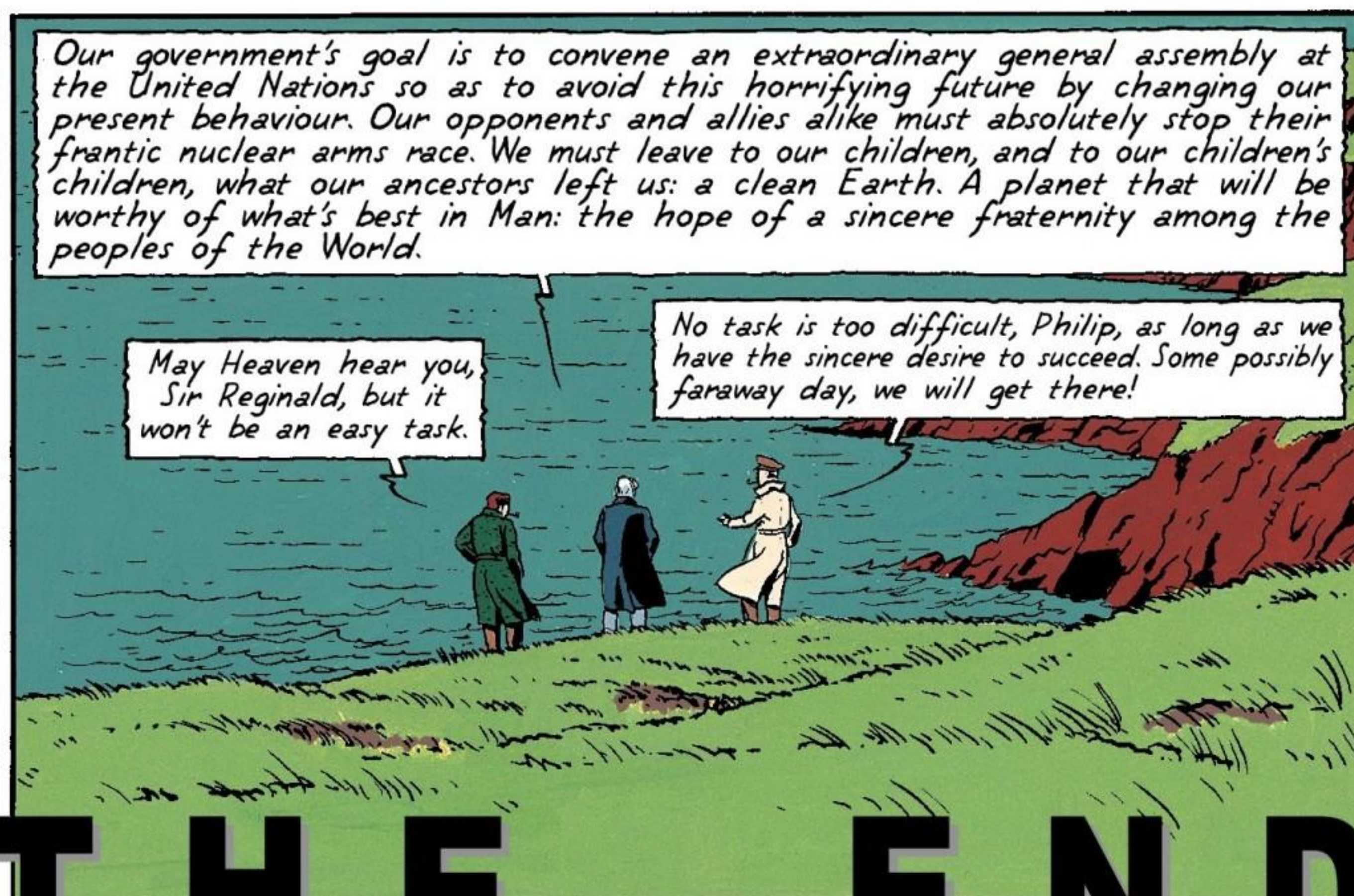
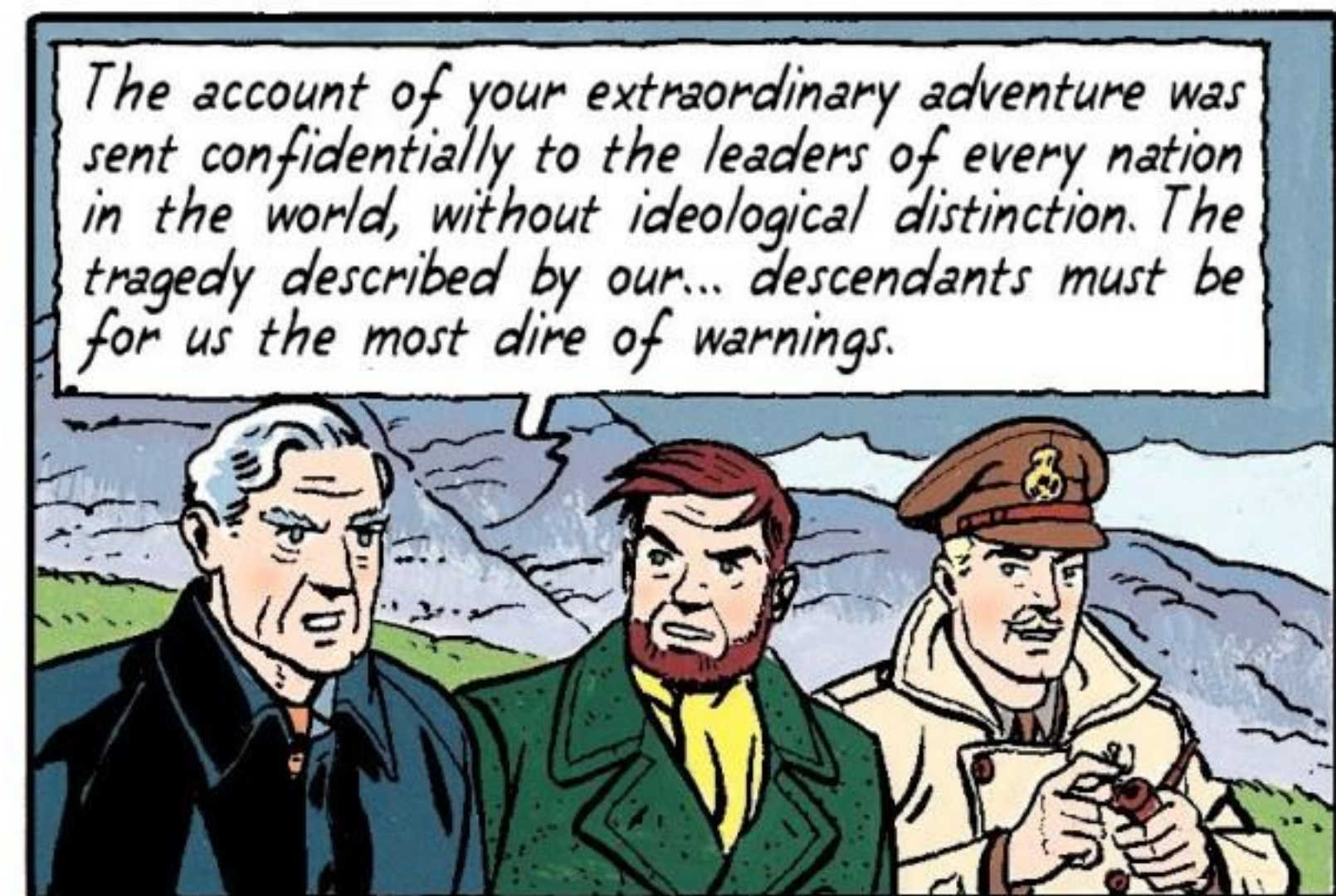
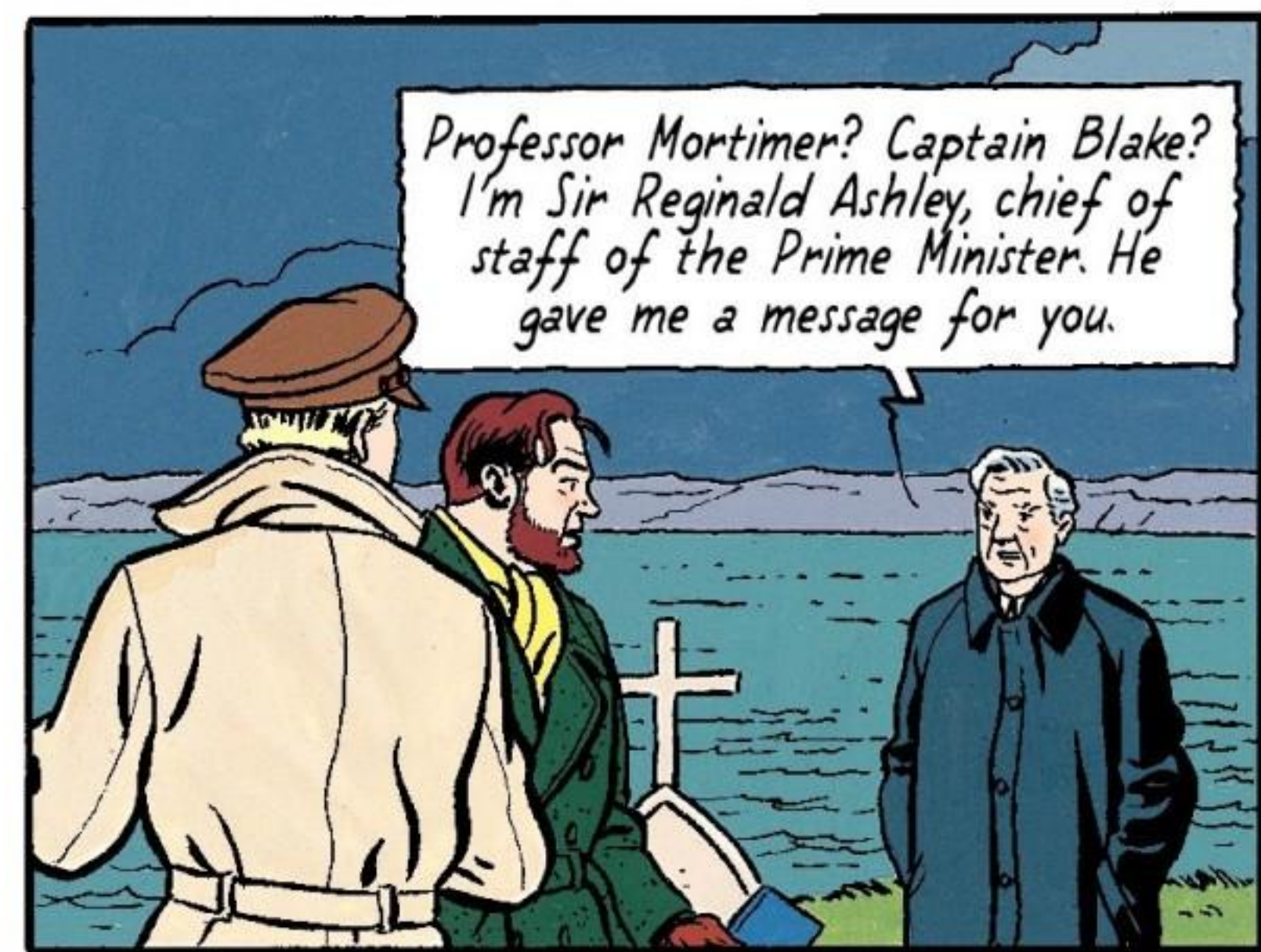
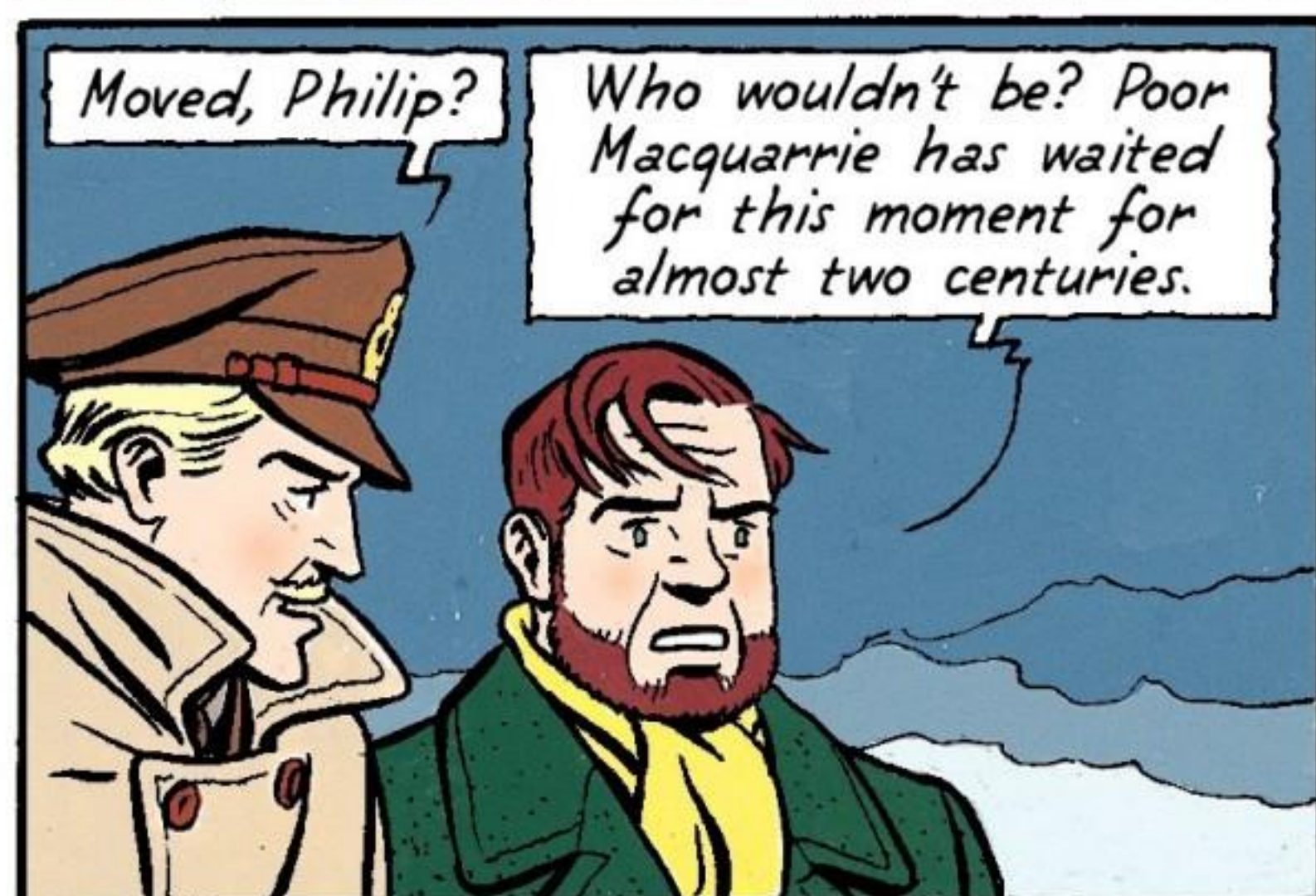
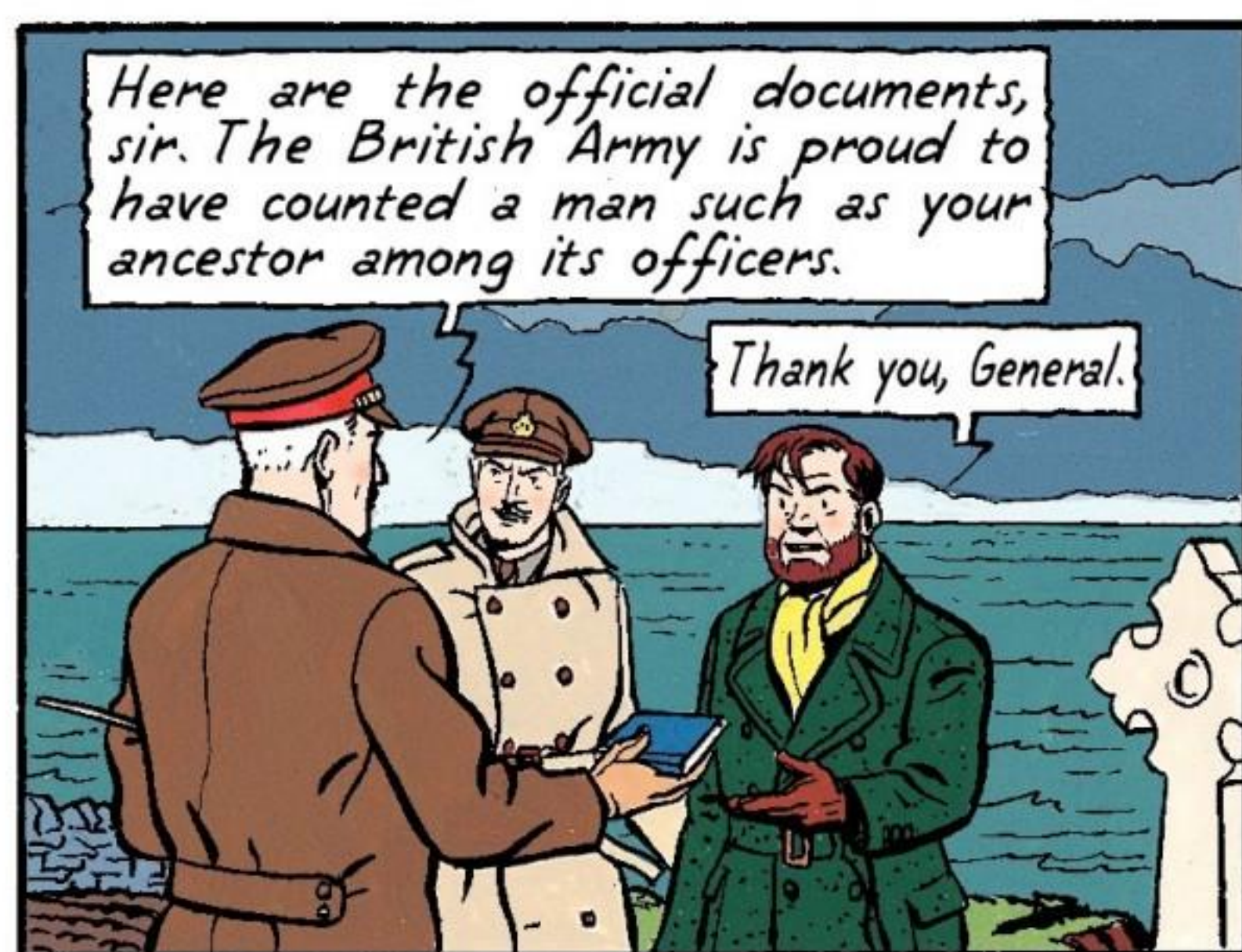
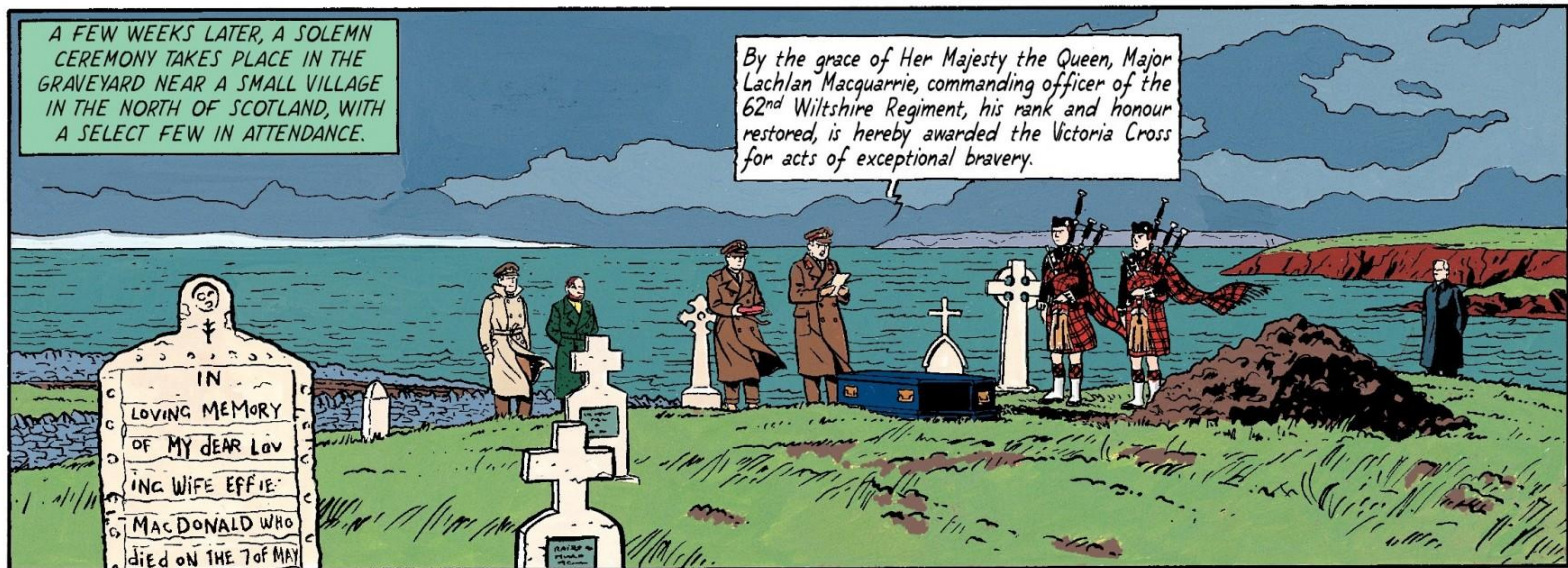
AAAAHH!

WITHIN MERE SECONDS THE BANDIT IS CAPTURED, WHILE MORTIMER HAS RUSHED TO THE YOUNG WOMAN'S SIDE.

Miss Wingo, it's a miracle!

The miracle is called a bullet-proof jacket, Professor. Never mind me: Just hurry up and disarm this blasted bomb.





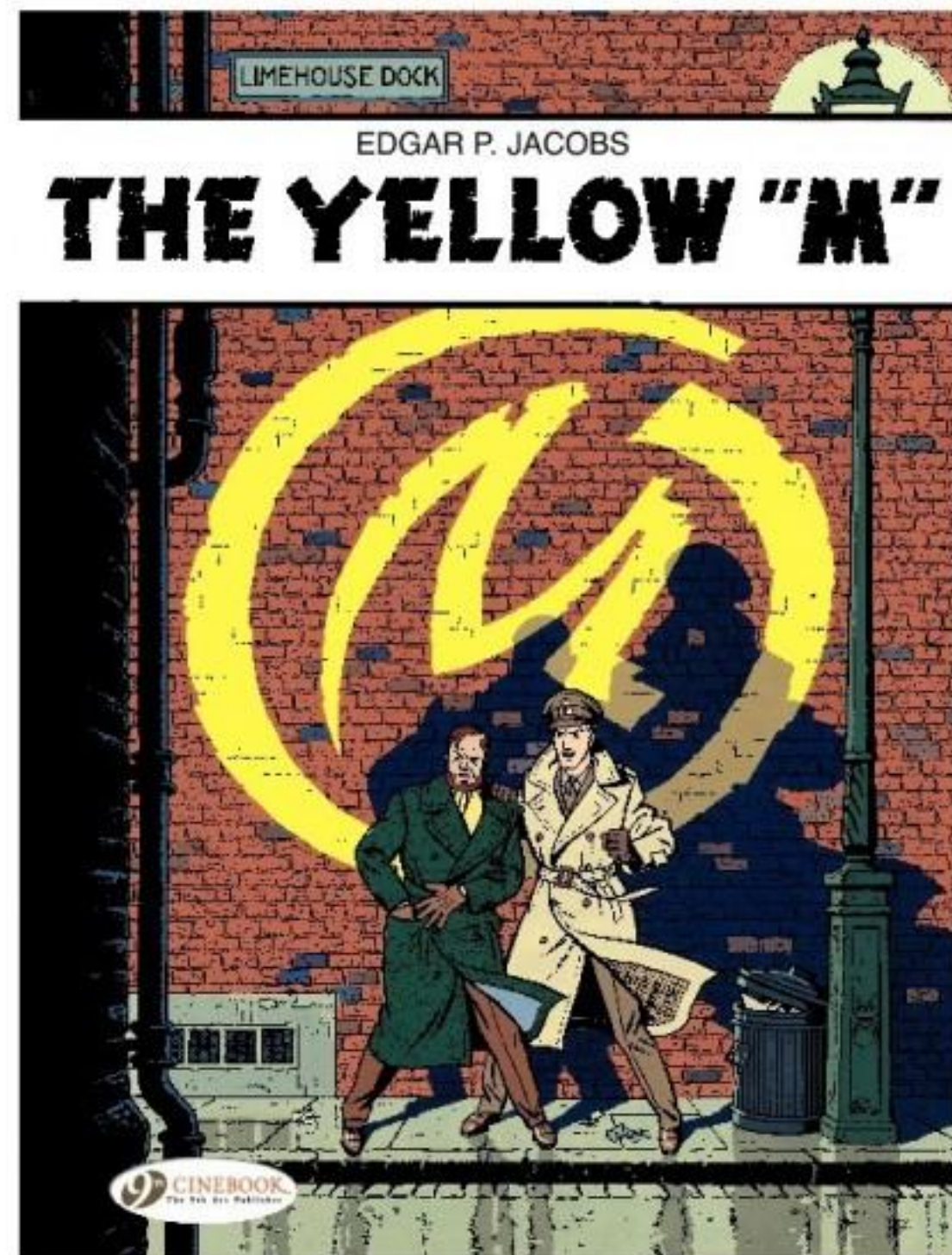
JEAN VAN HAMME

THE END

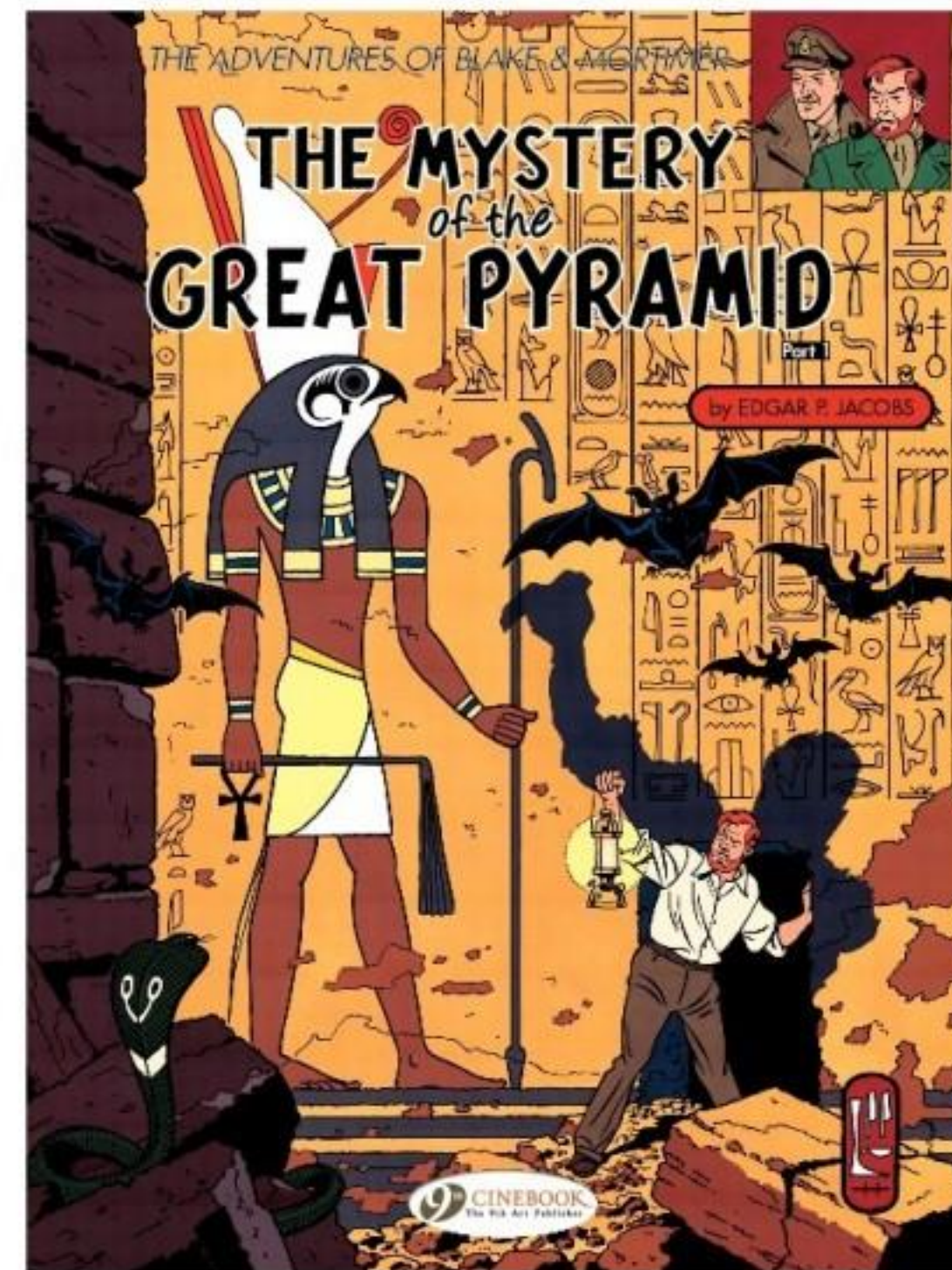
TED BENOÎT



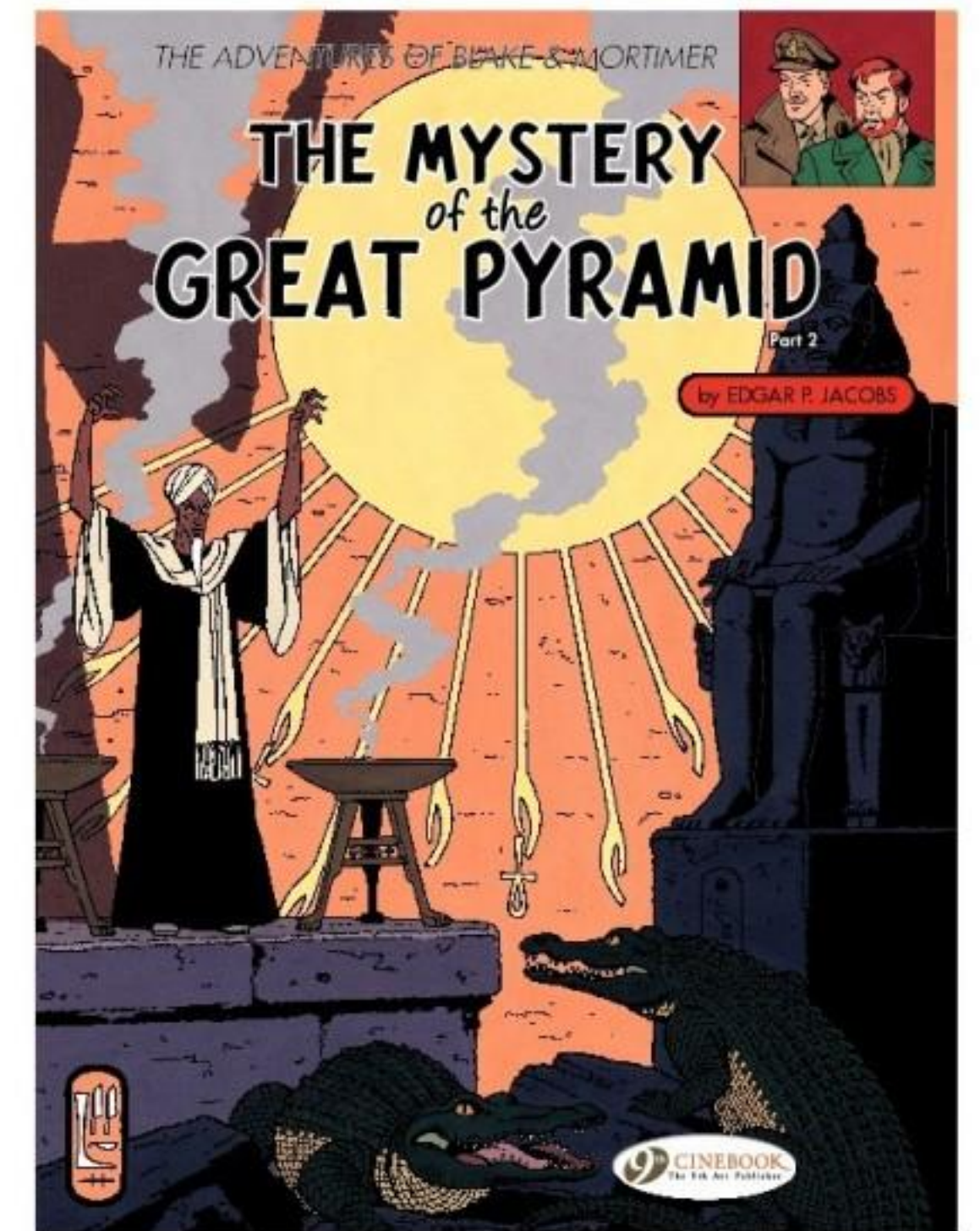
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



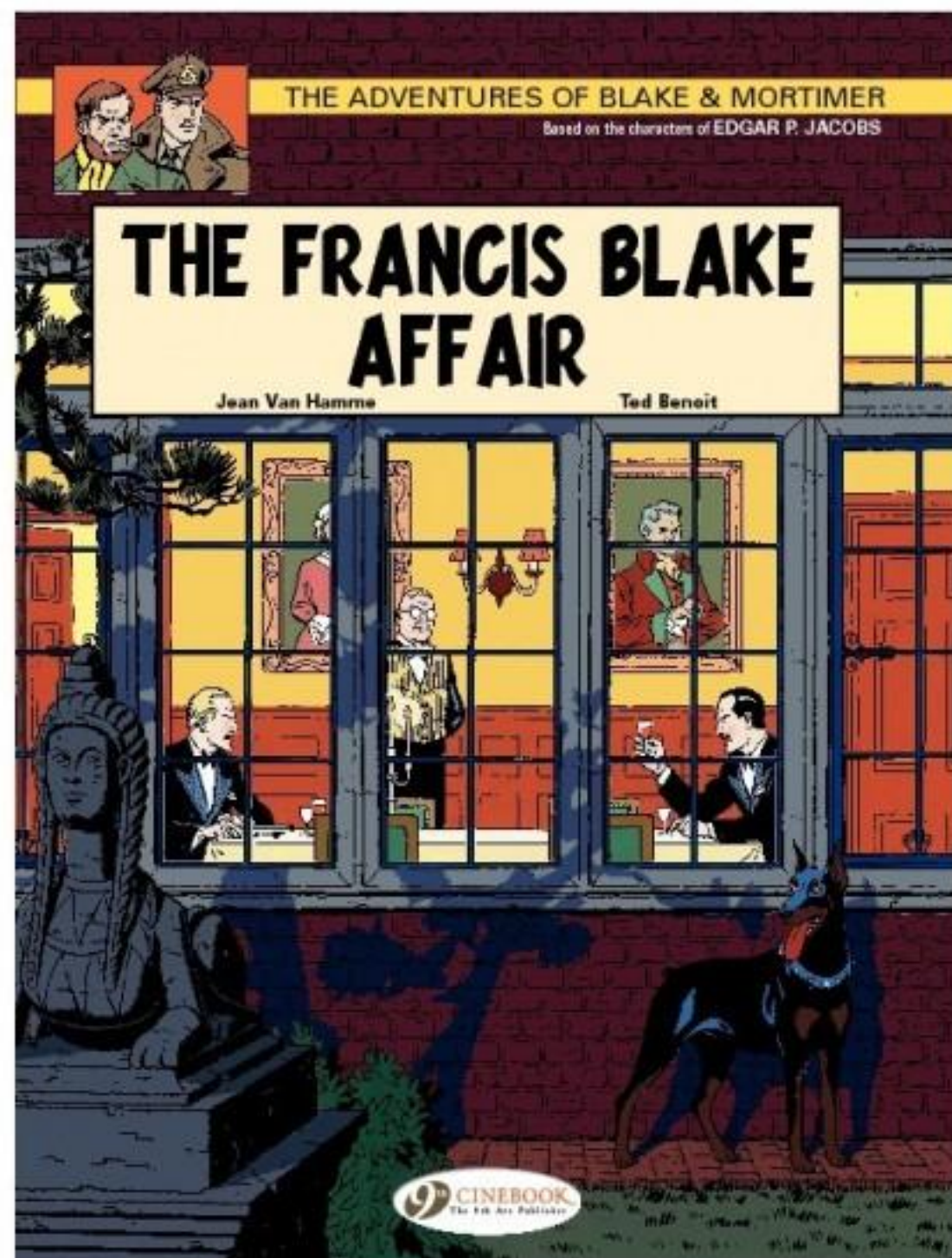
1 The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



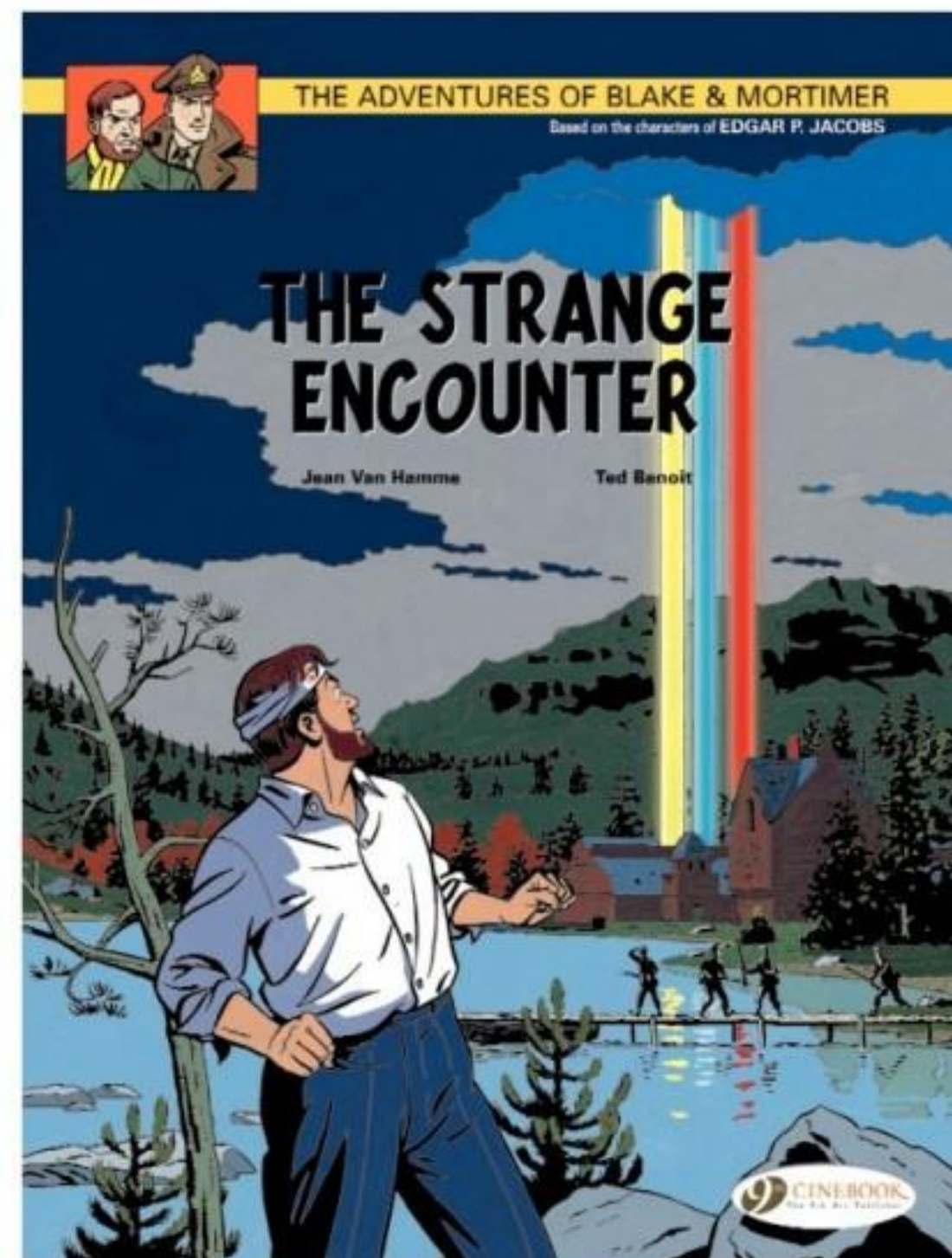
2 The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



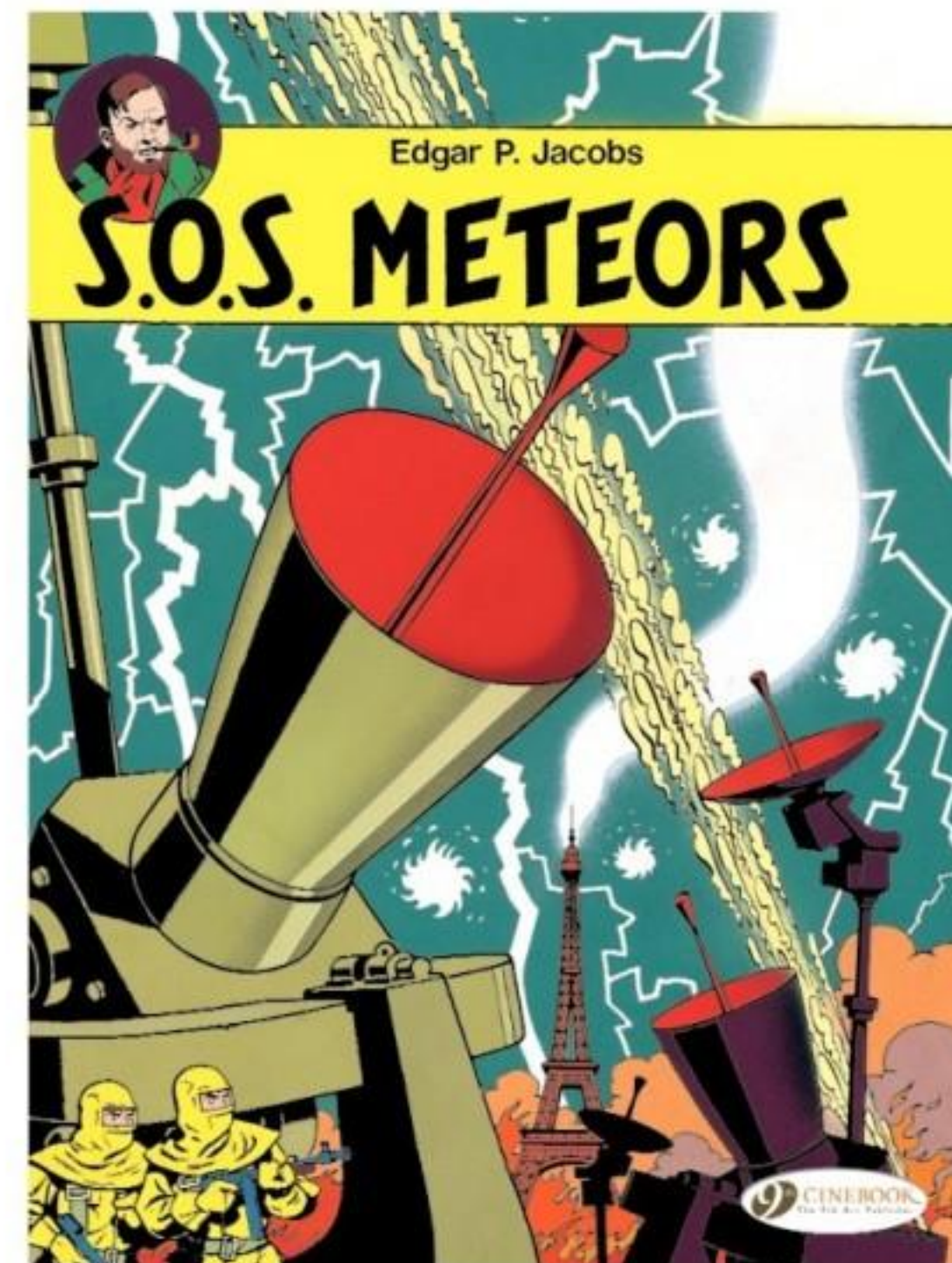
3 The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



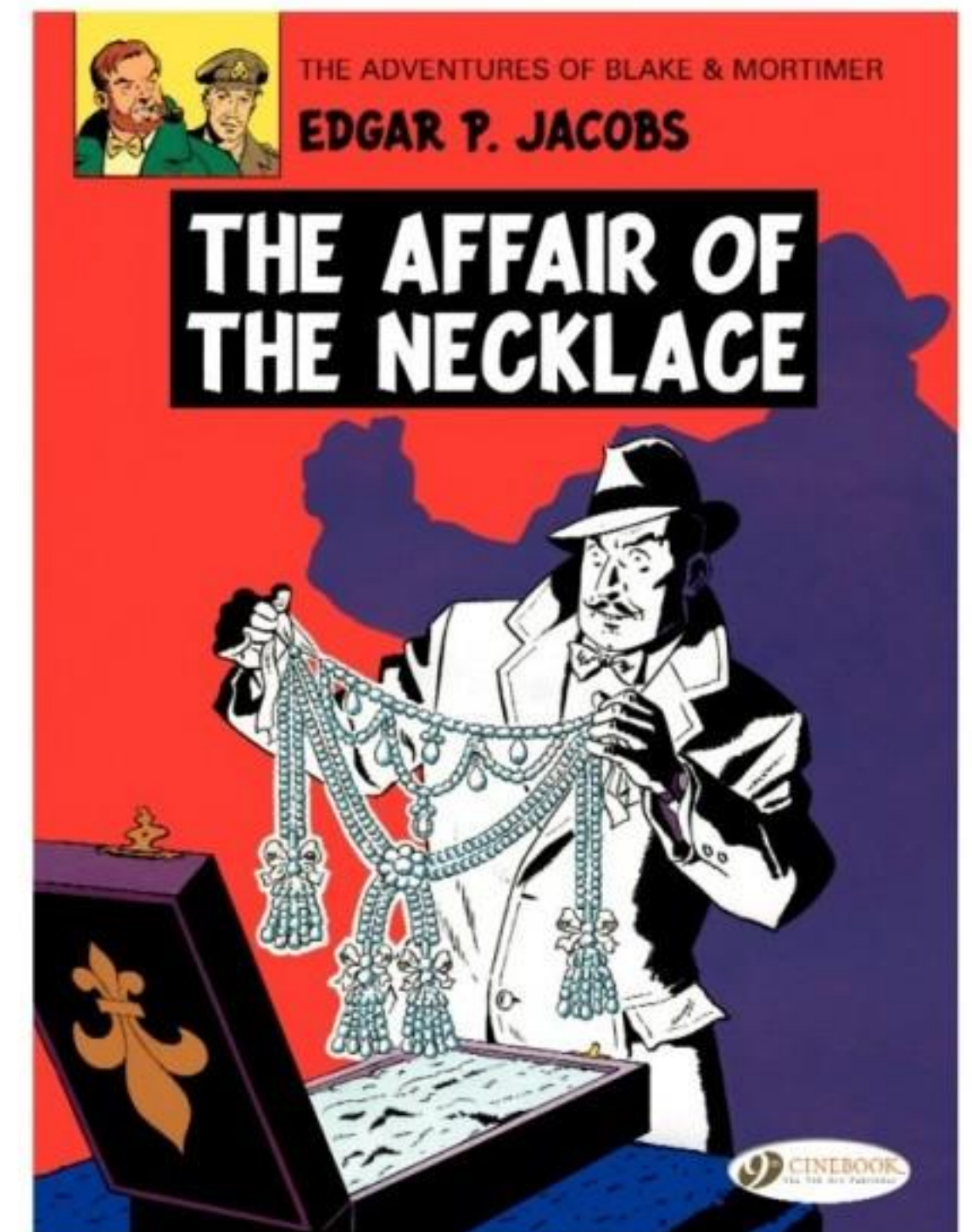
4 The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



5 The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



6 S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



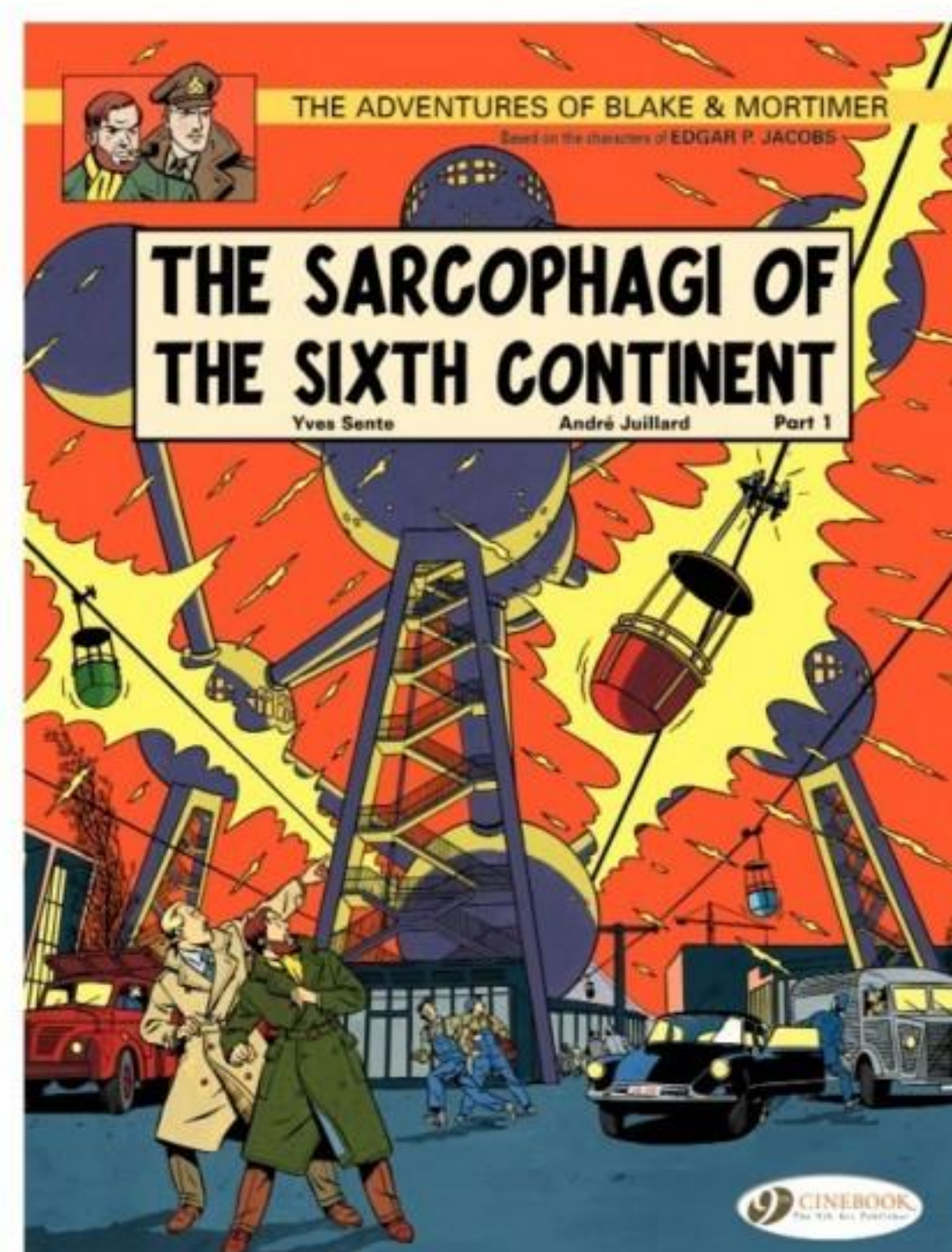
7 The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS

COMING SOON

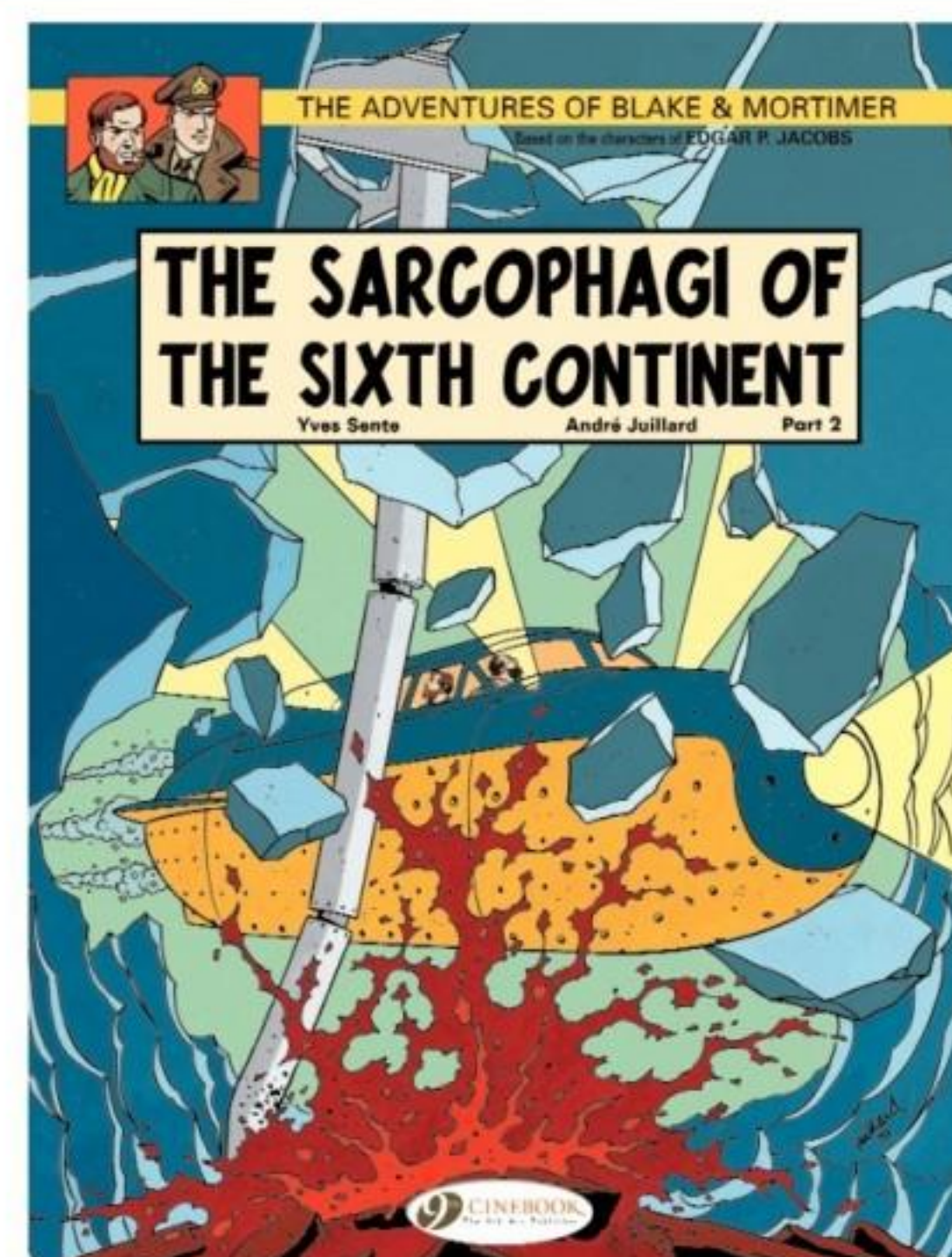
2011



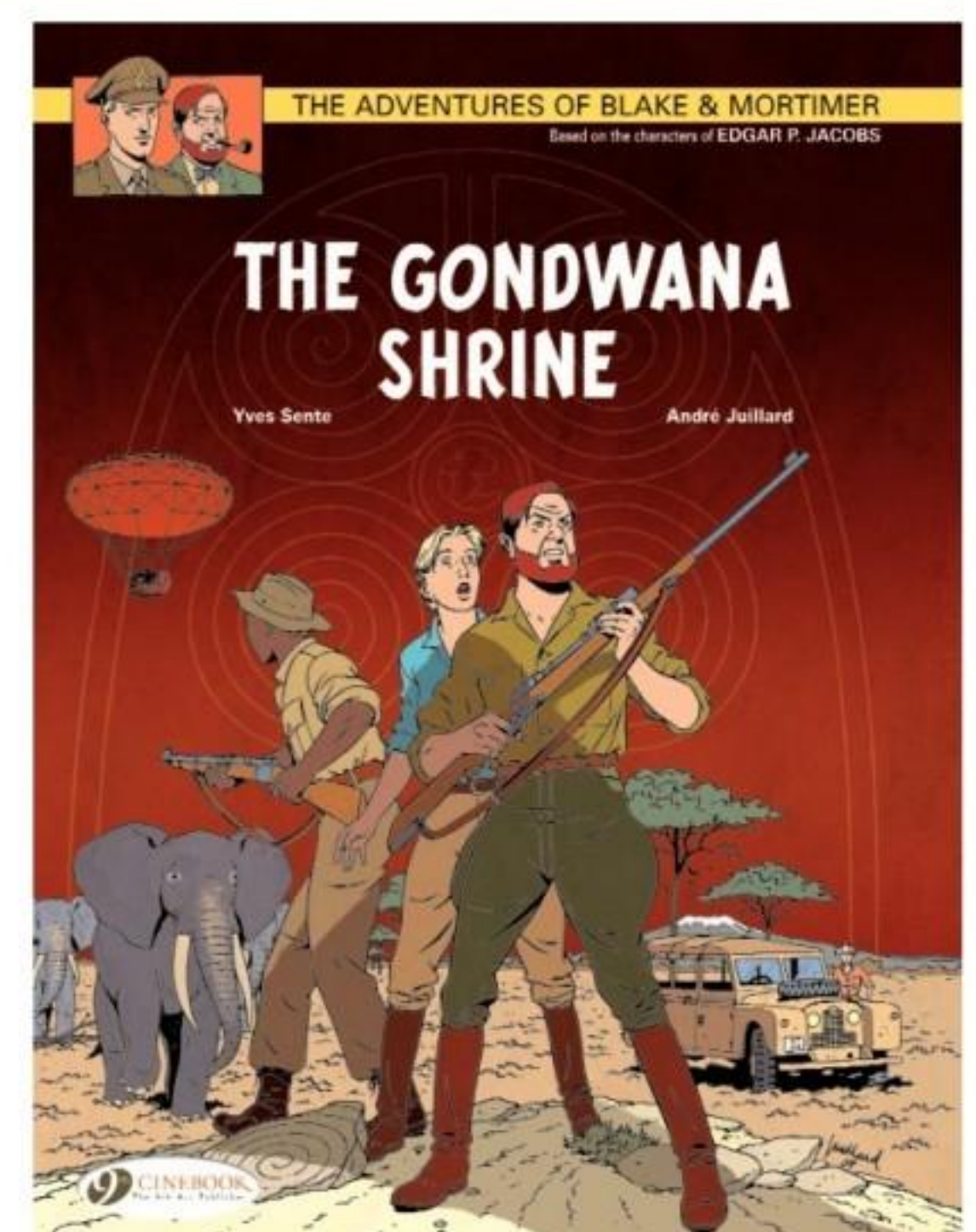
8 The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



9 The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



10 The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



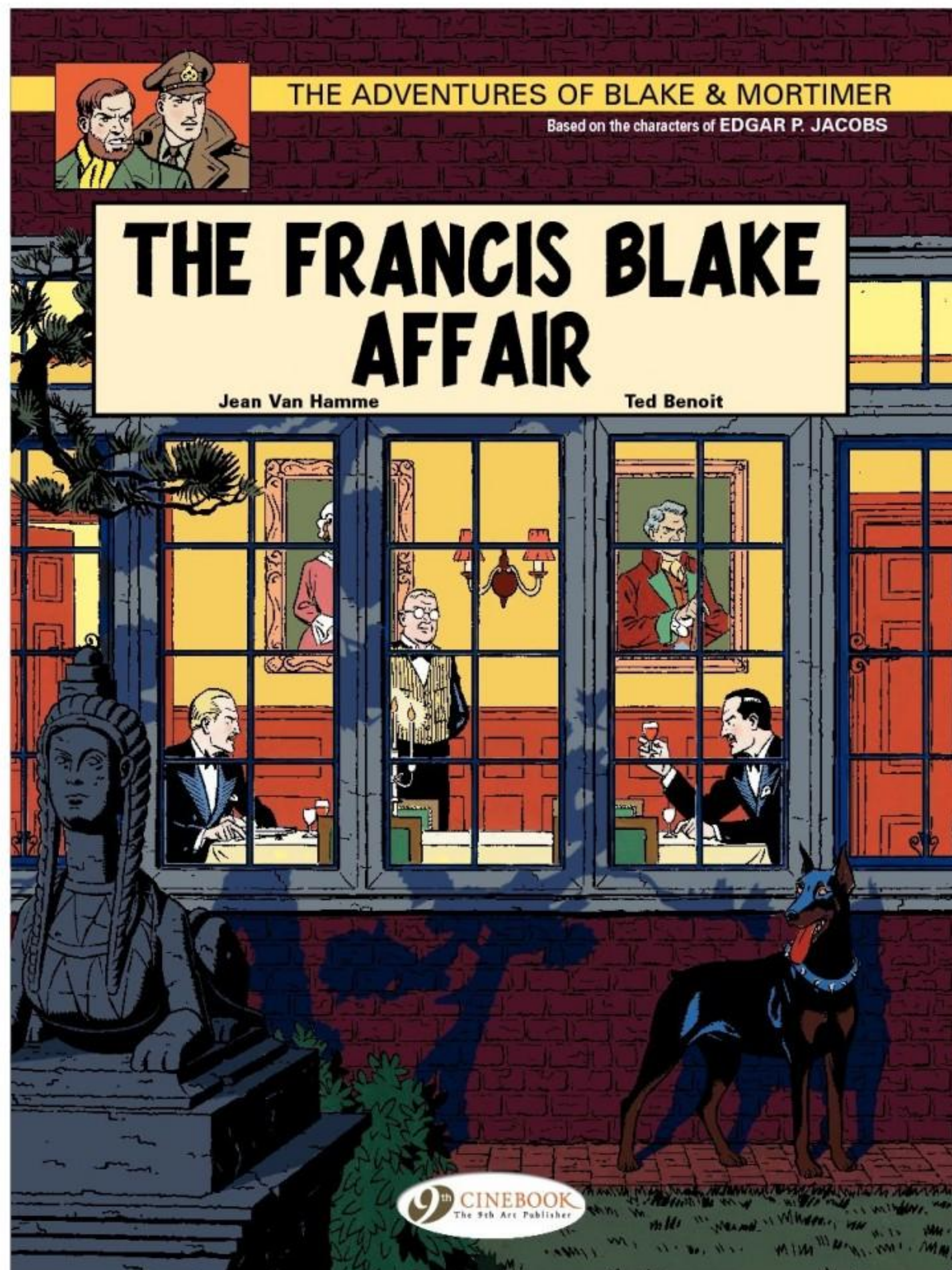
11 The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD

THE FRANCIS BLAKE AFFAIR

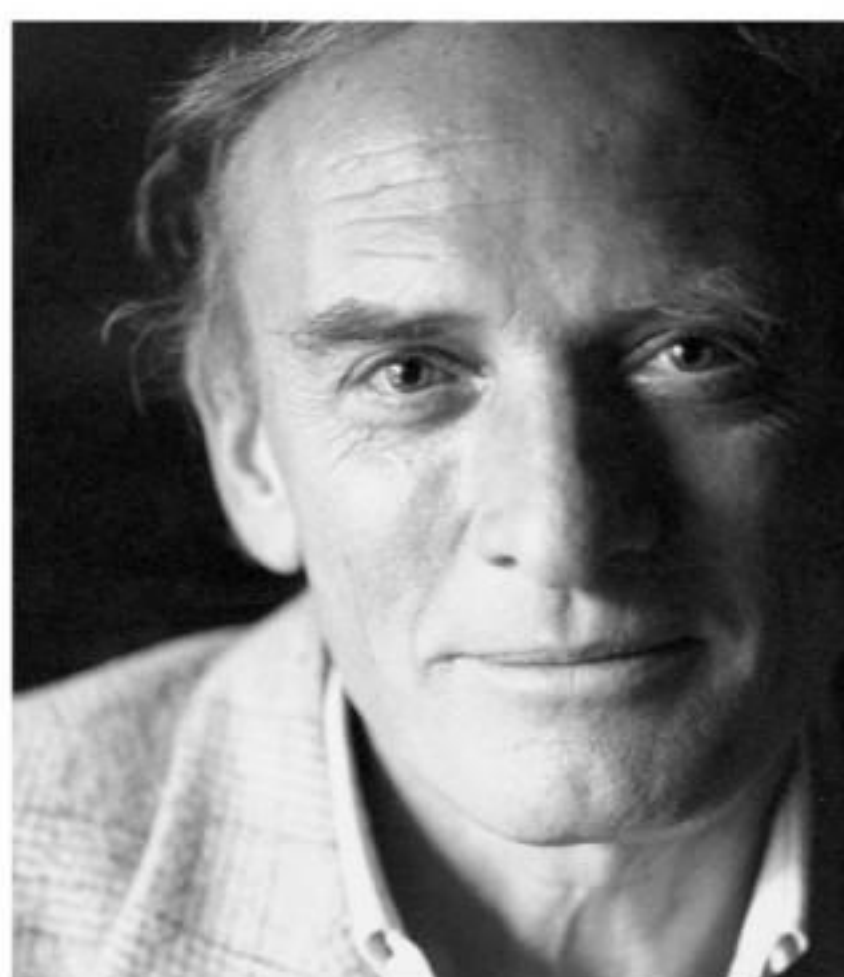
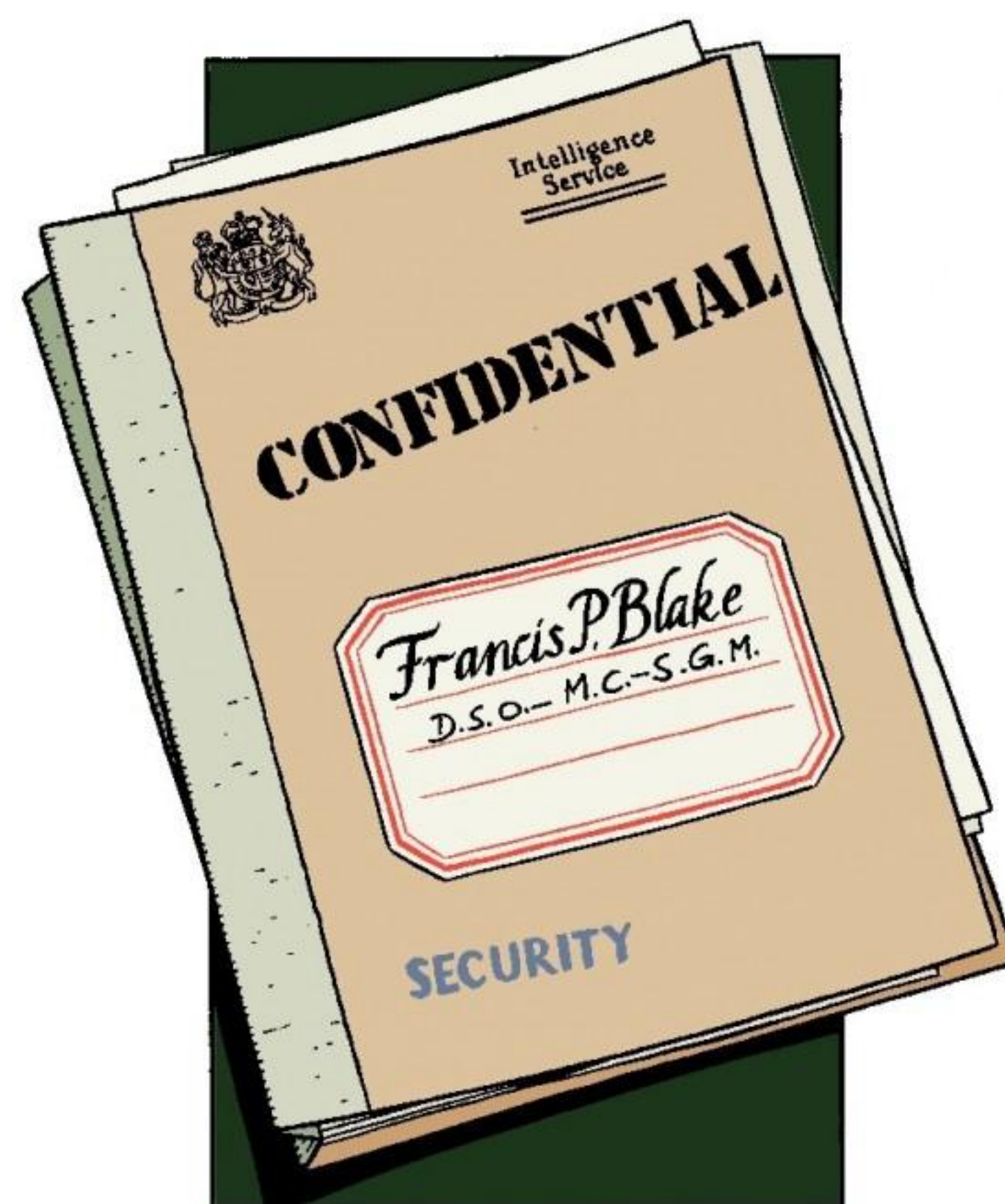
Jean Van Hamme

Ted Benoit

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

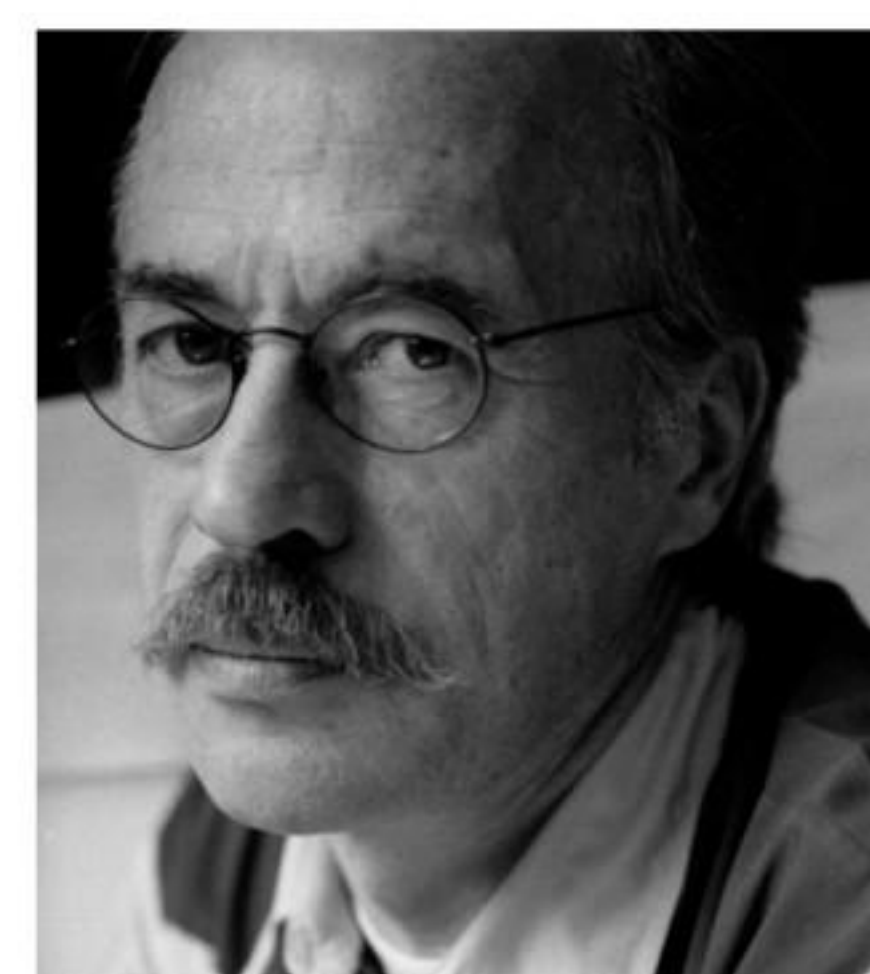


Scandal breaks in the London press: There is a mole in the Intelligence Service! And it appears without a doubt, in a photograph taken by agents of MI5, that the mole wears the face of Francis Blake! Mortimer is determined to believe that his friend has been forced to act against his will. But the initial investigations sweep away this hypothesis: Blake has opened, under an assumed name, an account fed by payments coming from the Bahamas. In a few months, he has withdrawn £30,000—more than 10 times his annual pay!



Jean **Van Hamme** is one of Belgium's most successful contemporary novelists and comics writers. His most popular successes are Thorgal (illustrated by **Rosinski**), Largo Winch (illustrated by **Francq**), Lady S (illustrated by **Aymond**) translated and published in English by Cinebook and XIII (illustrated by **Vance**). In 2005, he was appointed "Officier des Arts et des Lettres" by the French Minister of Culture.

The artist Ted **Benoit** is a big admirer and supporter of the Clear Line graphic style instituted by **Hergé** and E. P. **Jacobs**. His work is described simply as a combination of extravagance, meticulousness and intelligence. For over 30 years Ted **Benoit** has been creating work of surprisingly powerful simplicity, from the "Vers la Ligne Claire" collection in 1979 to the "Un Nouveau Monde" collection published in 2006.





AT THE TIME THIS NEW STORY BEGINS, AND WHILE LONDONERS ARE ENJOYING THE WARMTH OF AN EXCEPTIONALLY SUNNY MONTH OF JUNE, ALARMING NEWS REACHES THE EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY AS THEY HURRY TO THEIR OFFICES.

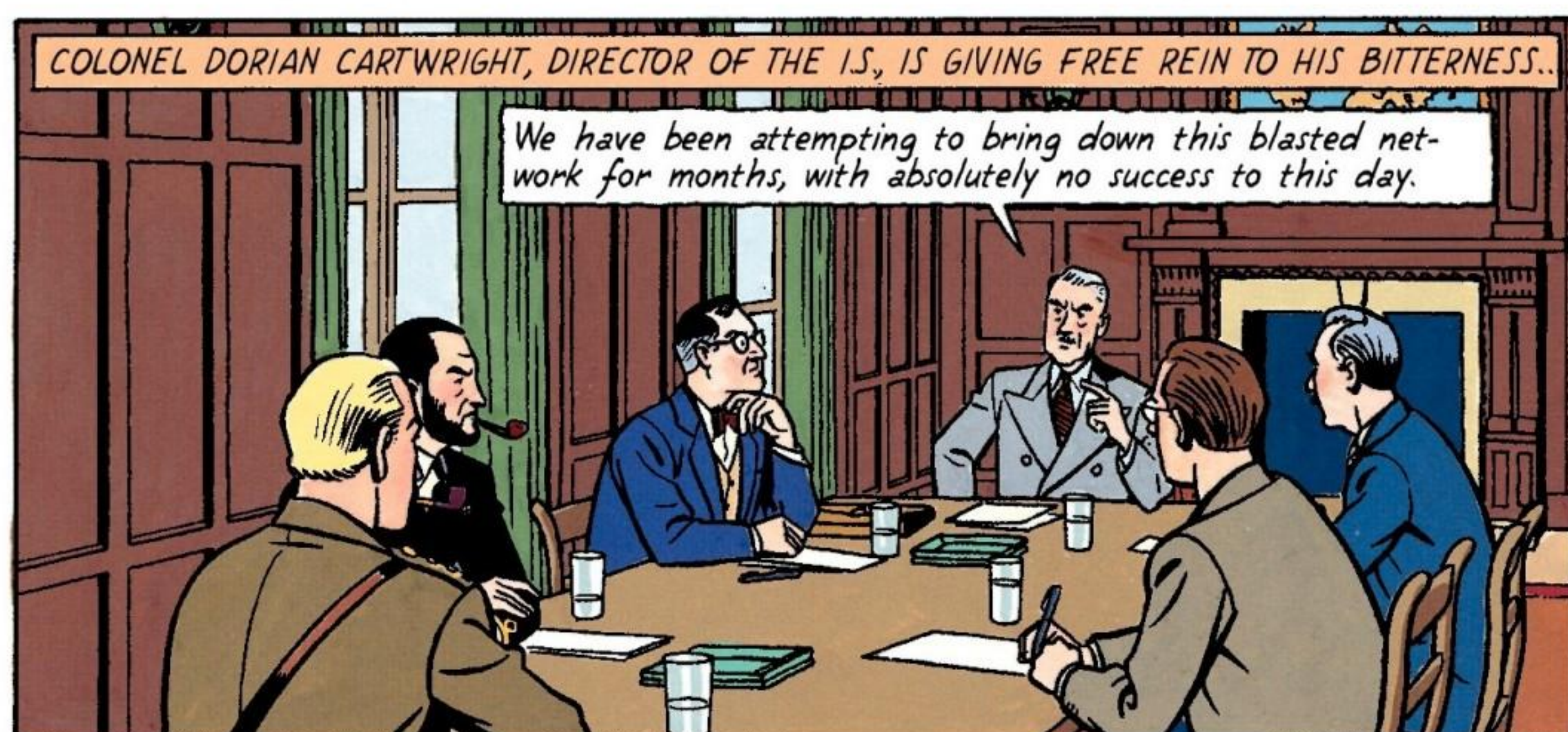
Breaking news! After his arrest, a spy reveals the existence of a network of foreign agents on British soil!

Get your Daily Mail! Is there a "mole" within the Intelligence Service?



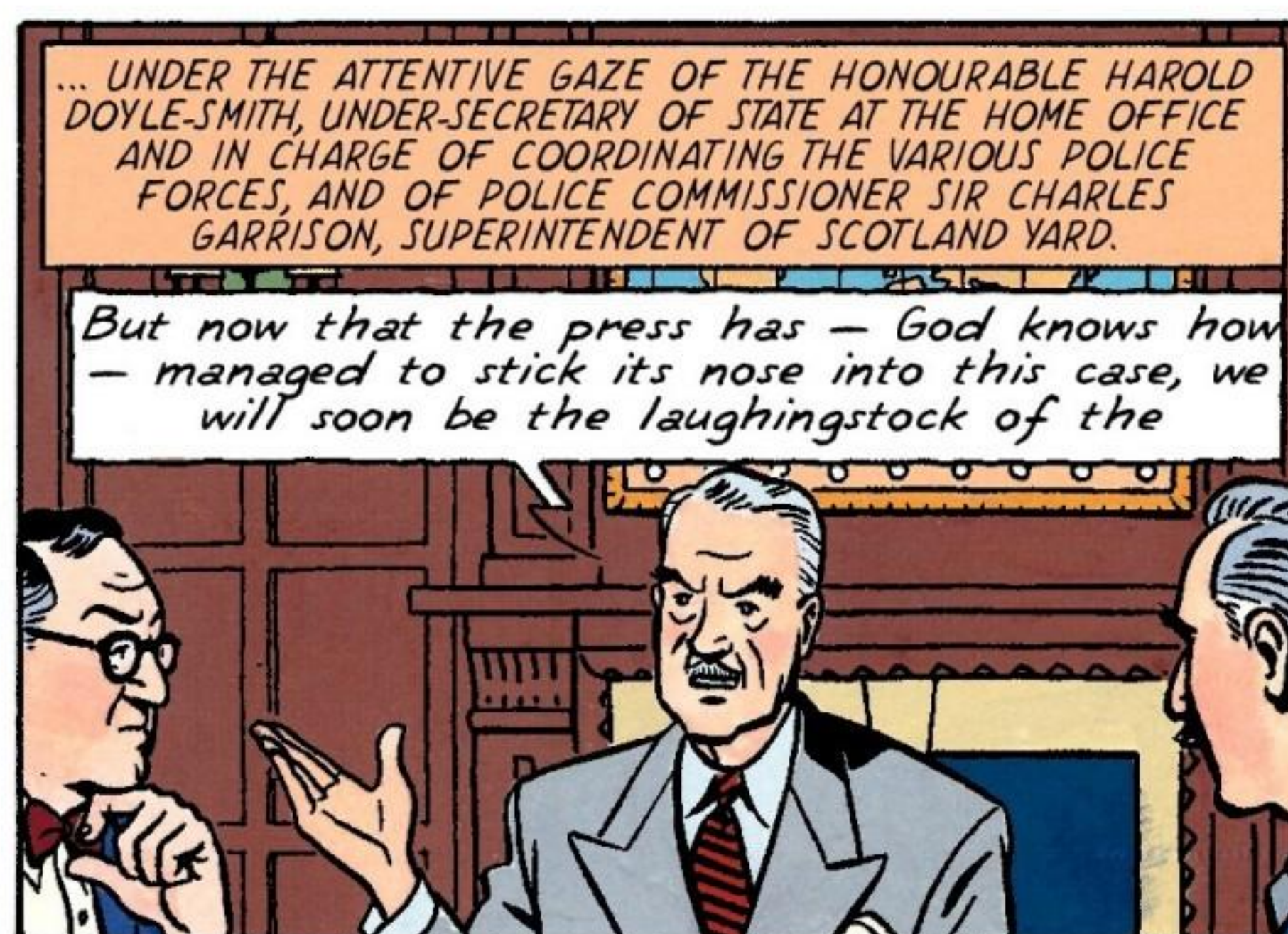
AT THE SAME INSTANT, AN IMPORTANT MEETING IS BEING HELD AT THE SEAT OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE.

This time, gentlemen, enough is enough...



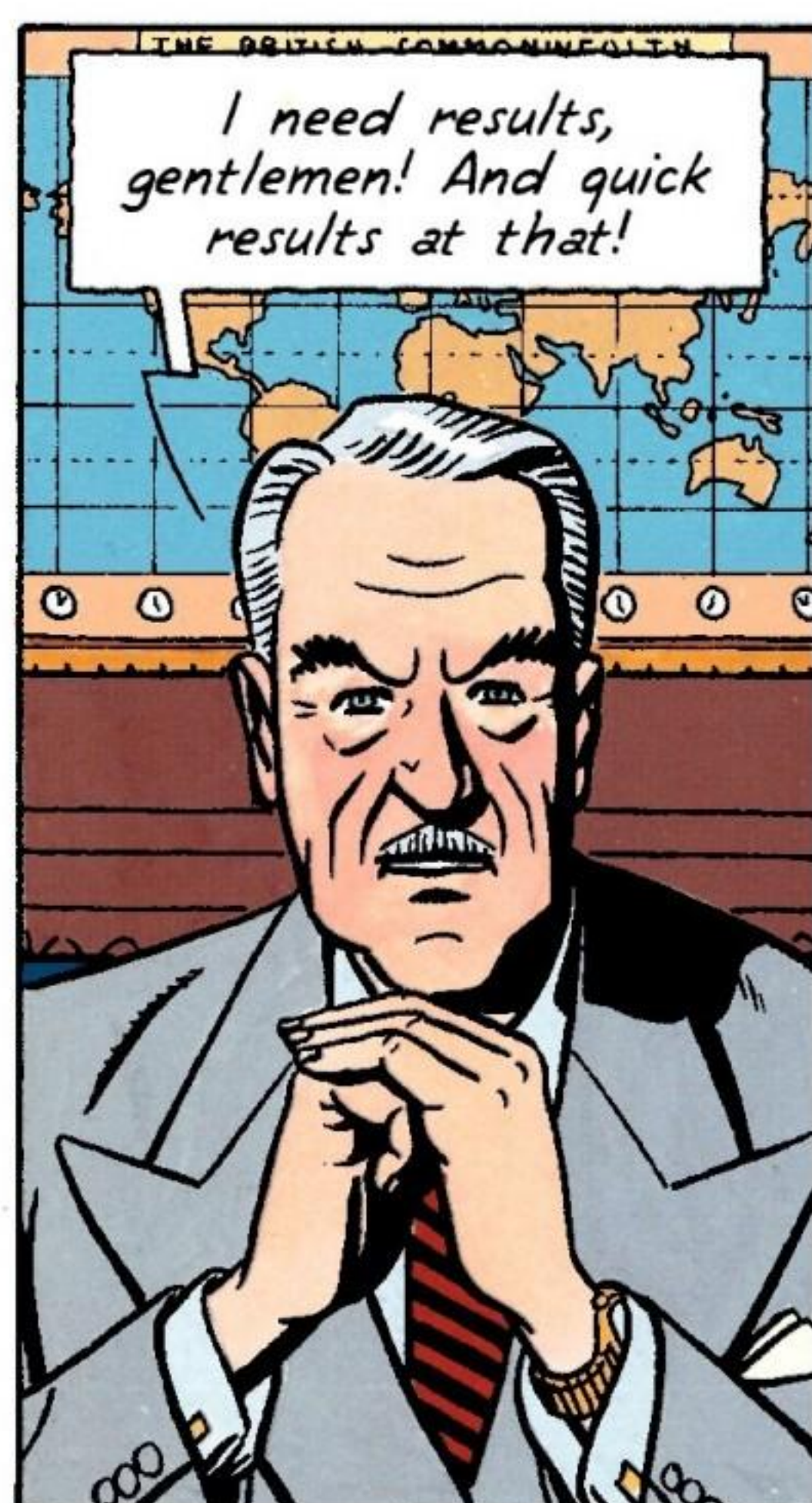
COLONEL DORIAN CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE I.S., IS GIVING FREE REIN TO HIS BITTERNESS...

We have been attempting to bring down this blasted network for months, with absolutely no success to this day.

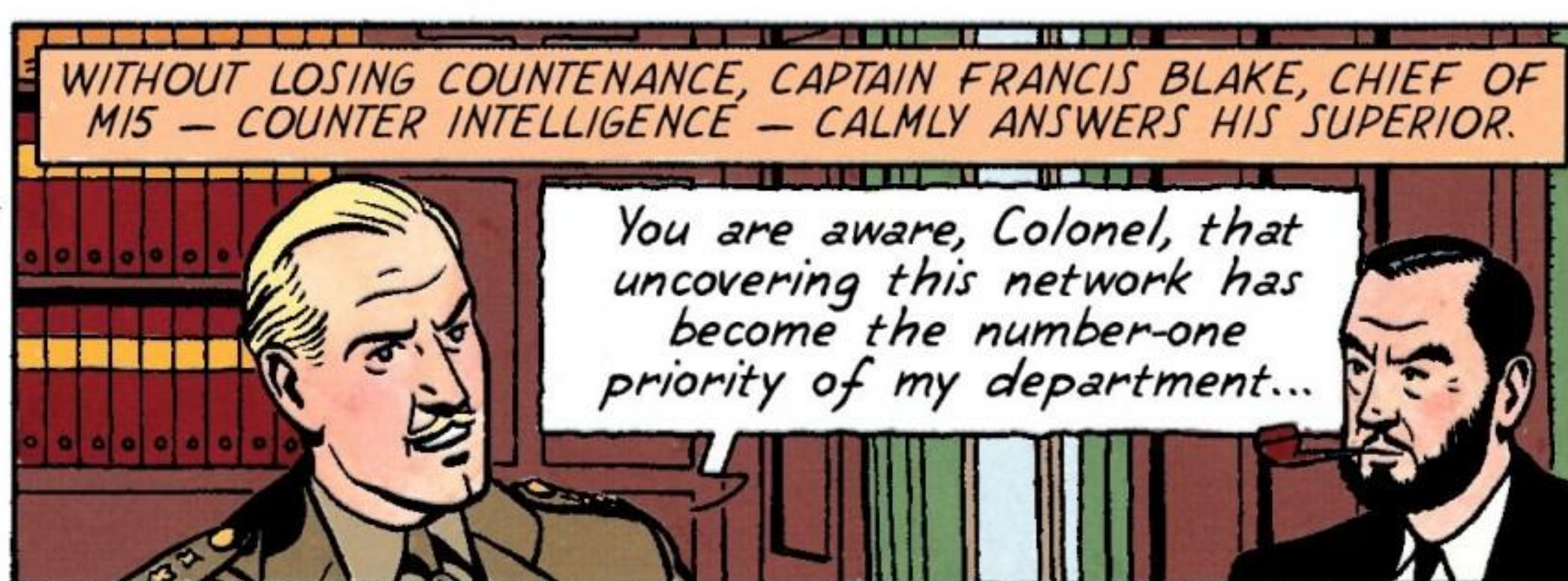


... UNDER THE ATTENTIVE GAZE OF THE HONOURABLE HAROLD DOYLE-SMITH, UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AT THE HOME OFFICE AND IN CHARGE OF COORDINATING THE VARIOUS POLICE FORCES, AND OF POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR CHARLES GARRISON, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCOTLAND YARD.

But now that the press has — God knows how — managed to stick its nose into this case, we will soon be the laughingstock of the



I need results, gentlemen! And quick results at that!



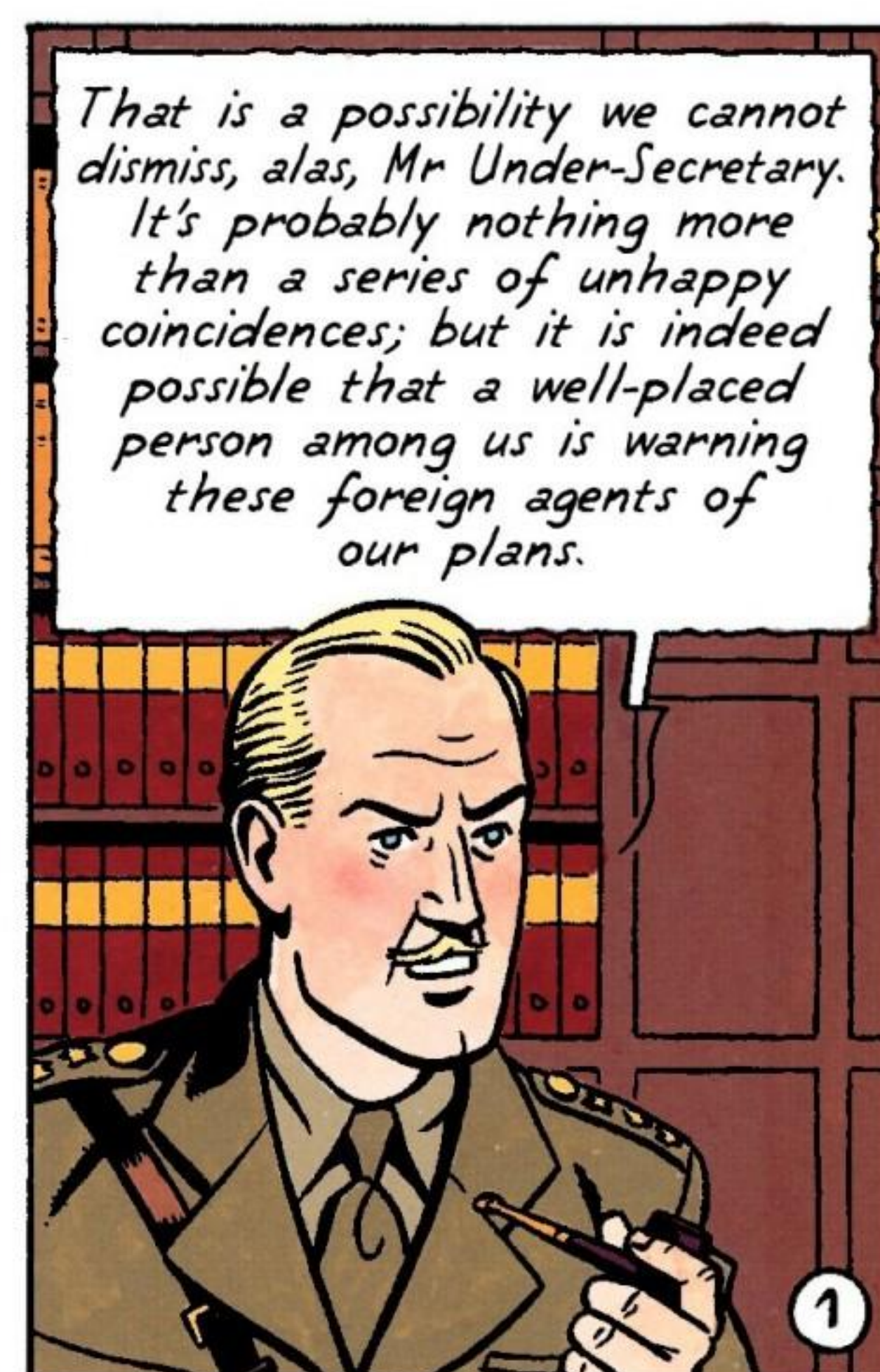
WITHOUT LOSING COUNTENANCE, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, CHIEF OF MIS — COUNTER INTELLIGENCE — CALMLY ANSWERS HIS SUPERIOR.

You are aware, Colonel, that uncovering this network has become the number-one priority of my department...



Unfortunately, every time we think we have the beginning of a trail, the rascals manage to vanish entirely, as if they had been mysteriously warned of our intentions.

Captain Blake, are you implying that this idea of a "mole" in the I.S., which I thought was a complete fantasy, could in fact be grounded in truth?



That is a possibility we cannot dismiss, alas, Mr Under-Secretary. It's probably nothing more than a series of unhappy coincidences; but it is indeed possible that a well-placed person among us is warning these foreign agents of our plans.

**WHEN EXTREME WEATHER THREATENS EUROPE,
MORTIMER IS CALLED TO THE RESCUE BY
THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT.**



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EDGAR P. JACOBS - 1946

1959 - 2009
**50TH ANNIVERSARY
S.O.S. METEORS**

SEPTEMBER 2009

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

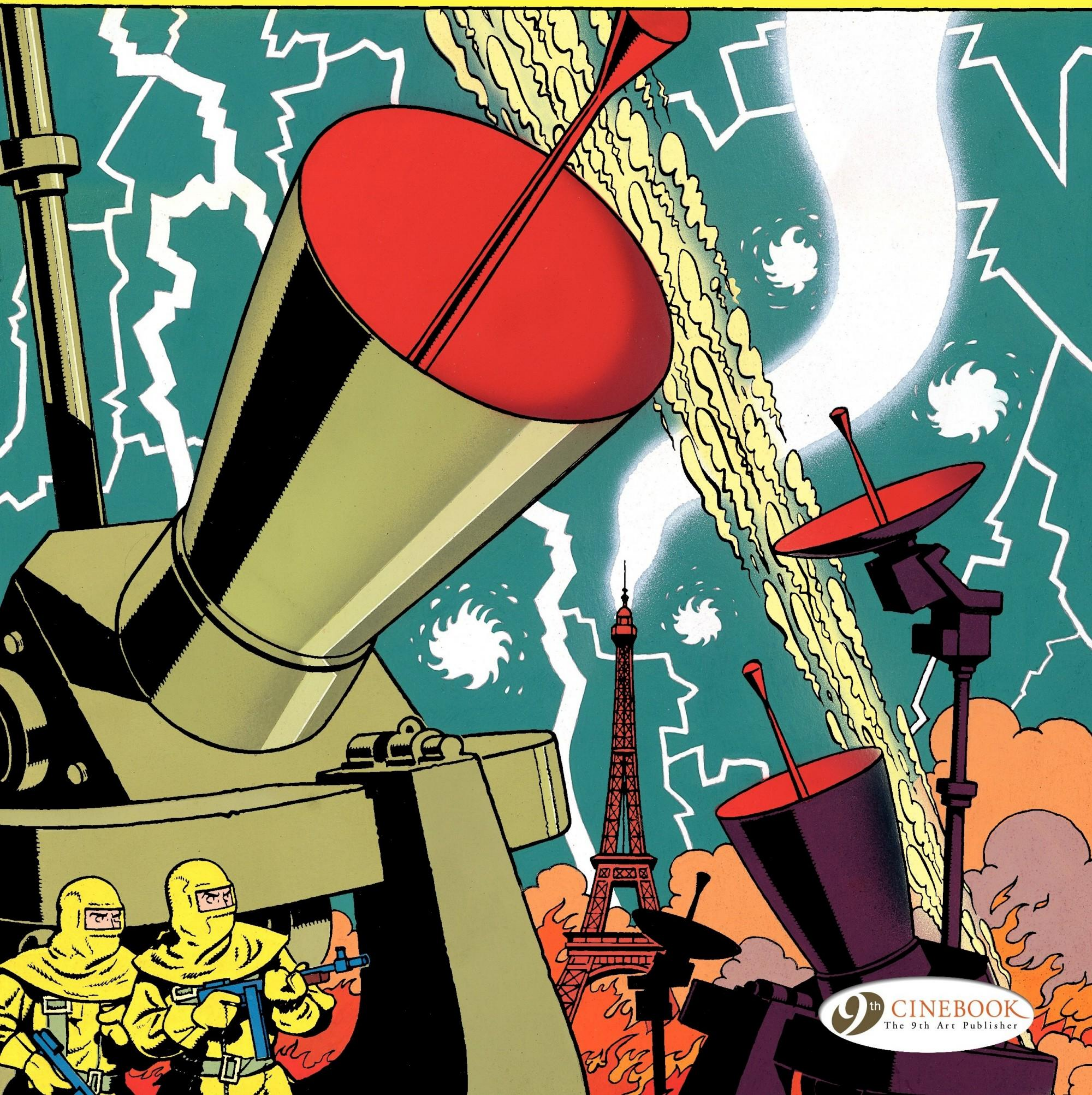
PUBLISHED BY





Edgar P. Jacobs

S.O.S. METEORS



Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine *Tintin* was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.



Volumes published in the Blake & Mortimer series:

1. 1950 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1*
2. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2*
3. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3*
4. 1954 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1 - Cinebook N°2 - 2007*
5. 1955 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2 - Cinebook N°3 - 2008*
6. 1956 - *La Marque Jaune: The Yellow "M" - Cinebook N°1 - 2007*
7. 1957 - *L'Énigme de l'Atlantide: Atlantis Mystery*
8. 1959 - *S.O.S. Météores: S.O.S. Meteors - Cinebook N°6 - 2009*
9. 1962 - *Le Piège diabolique: The Time Trap*
10. 1967 - *L'Affaire du Collier: The Affair of the Necklace - Cinebook N°7 - 2010*
11. 1971 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T1: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1*
12. 1990 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T2: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2*
13. 1996 - *L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Francis Blake Affair - Cinebook N°4 - 2008*
14. 2000 - *La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard): The Voronov Plot - Cinebook N°8 - 2010*
15. 2001 - *L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Strange Encounter - Cinebook N°5 - 2009*
16. 2003 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1*
17. 2004 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2*
18. 2008 - *Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard): The Gondwana Shrine*
19. 2009 - *La malédiction des 30 deniers (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer): The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver*

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THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



⑤ THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

Blake and Mortimer head to the United States to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding the discovery of a 177-year-old body, which appears to have died very recently. The body is that of a Scottish major, Mortimer's forebear, who was leading a British military expedition to the US in 1777, where he was swallowed up by a strange multi-coloured light-beam shining down from the sky. Blake and Mortimer fight men in black armed with green-laser guns and soldiers emerging from the past in order to save the Earth from complete obliteration.



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